

R U N E T R O O P E R S O

ルンパース

自衛隊漂流戦記

浜松春日

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ALPHA POLARIS
アルファポリス

Rune Troopers

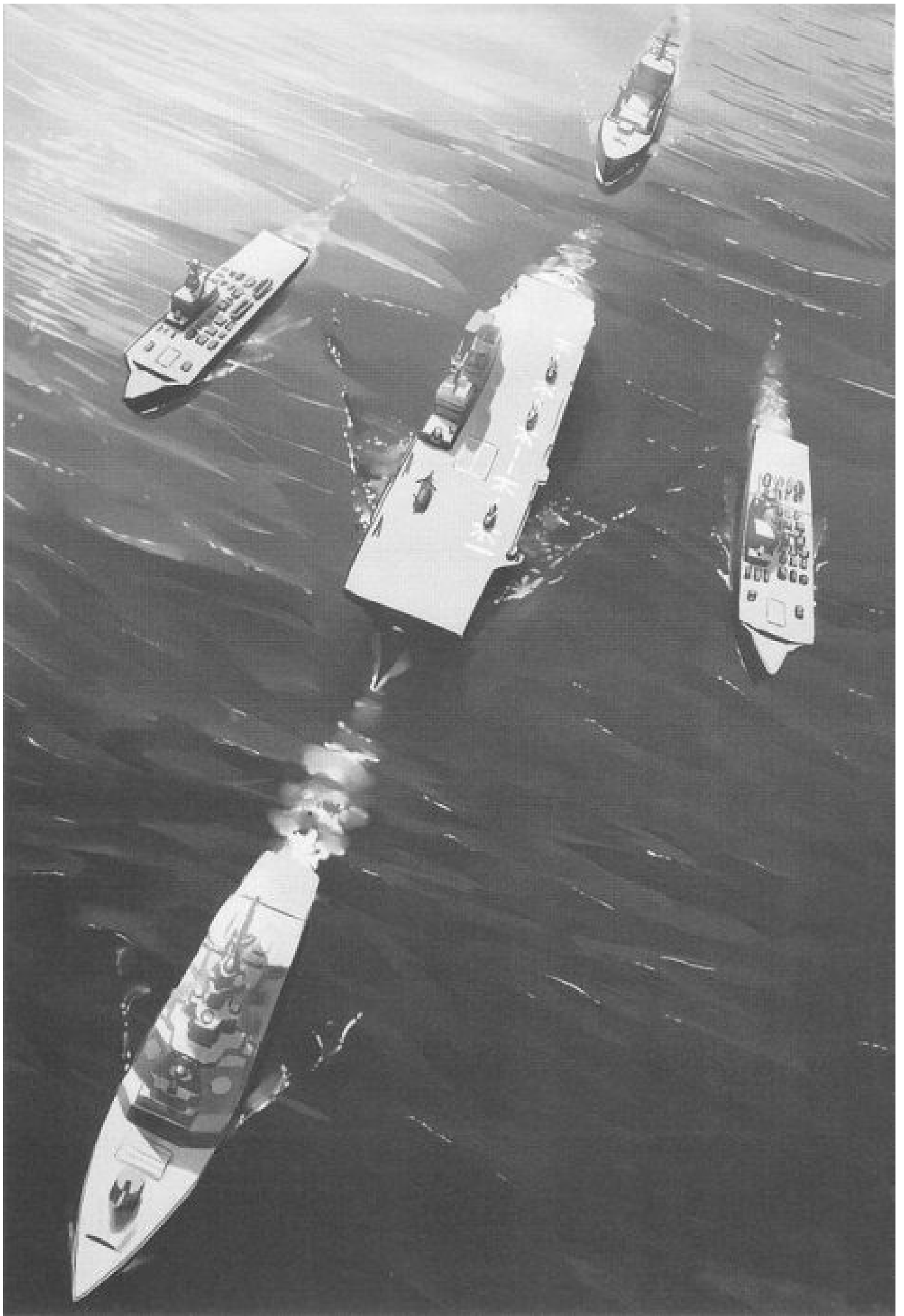
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Prologue: Yorimashi

In the decaying temple, you could hear the crashing sound of the entrance door being torn open.

In the circular, open space within the deepest part of the temple, you could still hear it.

Wounded, the expression of the exhausted knights was as evident as their resignation: There was no way to turn the tides any longer. They had just prolonged things for a little while.

The Imperial Capital had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and the gathered soldiers had barricaded themselves inside this temple at the base of the mountain. On the sixth day, the front gate gave way.

Soon the enemy would rush into this place as well.

The Holy Purominia Empire, which boasted 500 years of prosperity, was now awaiting its tragic end.

The god emperor no longer sat on the throne and the Elite Sacred Imperial Guard were nearly all in the stomach of the monster. If they left this cave, they could see the night lit completely in red over the burning Imperial Capital.

“Is it just a matter of time before we fall here?”

“Perhaps not, if you put the plan into action.”

The open space was faintly lit with the light magic of a lamp. An elderly man and a young woman, wearing the expressions of quiet despair and frenzy, were conversing.

They had escaped into the temple before the knights did. One was the high-ranking Shinto priest of the moon god and the other the head wizard of the magic school, who could manipulate first-class magic. They were already prepared for death.

But, they wouldn't fall easily. That type of bravery wasn't in them.

The man in an expressionless voice spoke to the altar in the middle of the

plaza.

“Is it good? Hyumuna.”

His hoarse voice had power in it.

“Yes...”

On the altar, the yorimashi (one who is supposed to be able to be possessed by a god) was sitting calmly. She was a girl just starting puberty.

Her body was wrapped in a white, thin robe of feathers that subtly showed that her hands were held together as she prayed deeply.

She had the white wings that proved her descent from the winged people, and looked so beautiful that she could easily be mistaken as some artificial doll.

What they were trying to do to her was heresy.

However, for those about to fall, it was a hope.

The battlefield, a field of slaughter, approached step by step.

Magicians who hid their faces in the hoods of their black robes, stood at equal intervals surrounding the altar in the middle.

They all were chanting the same words.

Their chant gathered together and intermingled in the cave.

“Drifting light from the void’s interstice”

The Yorimashi’s body was etched with fresh blood.

“Connect this world and the afterlife, may the guards not block us.”

The girl had a tortured expression.

“Have the winged people’s blood as a compensation I pray ye.”

Her overflowing blood is taken in by the magic formation beneath her.

“Show this world compensation from a different sky!”

At the same time as the poem finished, the enemy poured into the plaza, wherein a one-sided battle took place.

No, it would better be described as a slaughter.

The knights had lost their willpower, and the people wearing robes had no weapons. They fell one after another as the enemy army invaded. It couldn't be called resistance.

However, despair wasn't the only feelings on the faces of those who fell and stayed down. None of the enemy soldiers noticed it.

The corpse had a crooked smile hidden deep in his hood as his vacant eyes stared at the empty space where the altar had disappeared.

Chapter 1: Expeditionary Fleet Sails

Part 1

On that day Yokosuka City, Kanagawa prefecture, it was cloudy and from time to time it seemed as though it might rain.

For leaving the port, it was rather depressing weather.

Hiroyuki Kuze of the Ground Self-Defense Force lined up at the railing with a subordinate, and looked down at the Yokosuka Maritime Self-Defense Force base.

Because the Transport ship's deck was about the height of a four story building, they had a commanding view of the wharf.

Drizzle lightly hit his cheek. On the wharf, a television reporter's shrill voice could be heard.

"Yes! This is the Maritime Defense Force! Just now, the fleet has set sail! It is called 'International Cooperation', and the fleet is sailing to join a so-called UN Peacekeeping Force!"

She spoke in a purposefully tense voice which allowed Kuze to hear really well. This was probably for the evening news, which would portray the Self-Defense Force as "dispatching troops" to foreign countries with loud background music.

"This time, the dispatching fleet is a transport vessel and supply ships, defended by the state-of-the-art Aegis class Destroyer of the Maritime Self-Defense Force for a total of five ships. The transport vessel is said to hold state-of-the-art tanks and military helicopters. It is an 'operational unit' unlike any dispatch unit in the past."

The camera revealed the figure of the female reporter, in her raincoat, looking back at the fleet sailing away.

"The flagship 'Ibuki' is a state-of-the-art Aegis destroyer and was built to be a ballistic missile intercepting warship; the Self-Defense Forces have fully armed it

for overseas deployment. It will be deployed in Africa, where there is a strong possibility of the rebel army using ballistic missiles, and the 'Ibuki' has the duty via international law to shoot these missiles down."

The reporter brought out a flip diagram with a sketch of how to intercept missiles with accompanying explanation. And, with a tense expression, she then spoke of the strangeness of the current dispatch.

"The dispatch of the Aegis destroyer 'Ibuki' is said to be full of upper class government and defense ministry members."

The reporter turned the flip over, revealing a picture from the previous year's military parade, by the North, of its mobile ballistic launch system.

"The 'North' nuclear armament is ready for the theater of war and can be seen in the background."

She lowered the flip and looked at the stem of the Aegis destroyer that was out at the open sea.

"The awaited Destroyer with the ability to intercept nuclear missiles is being dispatched to Africa. In the worst-case scenario, an anti-government group launches a ballistic missile and we launch our counter-attack. As a result, Japan can show the world it has an effective defense against nuclear attacks. Behind this international collaboration is the government's plans, which isn't without connection to how tense the military picture of the Far East has become..."

He could no longer hear the reporter's voice. They had gotten away from the land.

In Kuze's heart, he realized they were now leaving Japan and going to a different place, and his true feelings burst out. Like a feeling of wide solidarity confused with a mysterious feeling.

Kuze raised the visor of his camo work hat a little bit and looked for a familiar face among the family and relatives at the sendoff on the wharf.

At this moment, Kuze, who will be 24 years old this year, it was at this moment that his honest seeming and softhearted face became as cloudy as the weather.

Though young, he wore an officer's insignia at his collar: a cherry blossom and a bar. He is three steps below a major, or a second lieutenant.

What the young officer was looking for was his ex-girlfriend, with whom he split up a few days ago. The split up notwithstanding, he had still hoped she'd be at the sendoff. But, coming to an ex-boyfriend's sendoff does sound weird to say the least.

In the end, his expectations were not realized. His hopes were regretful, ultimately. A disappointed Kuze raised his eyes toward the sky.

Though it was just a light drizzle, little by little, they turned into large raindrops.

"Are you crying, Platoon Leader Kuze?"

Standing next to Kuze was a young—well, the only way to describe him is as looking very young—new crew member and subordinate, who was asking. "Ichinose" was embroidered on the breast pocket of his camo uniform.

Though he was like a kid laughing menacingly as if with some profound, deep meaning, and despite him being the subordinate and Kuze being his superior, it didn't matter: they got along. Kuze thinks maybe it is because he says the opposite of what he would without any hesitation or reservation.

"I'm not crying."

Honestly, it was a bluff.

"That's a lie, you were SO crying. Your girlfriend didn't show up."

"EX-girlfriend, stupid."

"And yet you are crying now."

Letting out a single sigh amongst a wry smile, Kuze put on the serious face of a captain and looked at the people on the wharf.

It was like a Hollywood film, with lovers meeting and kissing and whispering, "I'll pray you come back home safely." I won't ask for this sort of extravagance. Just, somebody by your side that you want to protect. That's what I want. It's not such an extravagance for a self-defense officer, I thought. There shouldn't be a "serviceman" who can complain about no one seeing them off.

As she said when I graduated from the Defense Academy, I didn't have to make the pitiful choice of the path of becoming an officer in the Self-Defense Force; I could have become just a normal salary-man at some company, maybe it would have been fine if I became like that.

Yet she waited for me. Even till the very end, she still waited.

"Someone as kind and gentle as you wouldn't be suited to be a Self-Defense Force commander."

Indirectly, she wished for me to think of 2 people's futures. I wasn't able to fulfill her wish.

What a sorry sight I am....

The rain continued to pour on the deck of the transport vessel, and Kuze became disgusted with himself.

"...Is such a stubborn man disliked by more than his ex-girlfriend?"

"You, you're gonna have to clean toilets for 3 months straight starting today."

"What an abuse of authority!"

"Ah! Ichinose, look!"

Kuze pointed to one young girl still at the wharf. She wore a high school uniform and had twin tails.

"See, over there. Your younger sister came to see you off. She looks worried."

"Oh! Mina!? Man, even after I said it was alright."

The crowd disappeared immediately across the horizon after shrinking to the size of a grain of rice. To those at the send of point, the fleet did the same among the rain.

When the reporter saw the fleet disappear in the fog, she spoke.

"The fleet will make an arrival in Africa in about 1 month, we predict. After arrival, the live ammunition exercise on land and at sea will begin with the other participating countries; which will retain the rebel army. The Ground Self-Defense Force will set up base to the rear of the American army and provide logistical support such as medical treatment and water transportation."

Thus, the Self-Defense Force contribute to the UN dispatch fleet left its mother country. What was awaiting it? A departure no one expected.

Part 2

Aegis. In Greek mythology, the high god Zeus gave it to the Goddess of wisdom and military victory Athena: the strongest shield. It is called the Aegis Destroyer.

It is called the Aegis system. It is called the “Air Defense system,” being equipped with high-power radar and computers that track and target over 200 different targets at the same time, being the strongest air defense warship in all the world. It is the Self-Defense Force and Japan’s utmost symbol of Japanese war philosophy: the Exclusively Defense Security System. The Maritime Defense Force Aegis Destroyer “Ibuki”’s “first deployment meal”, or lunch started at the same time as the announcement.

Since it displaces about 10,000 tons fully loaded and is 170 meters in length, it is a large-scaled warship, even compared internationally.

As a matter of course, it has a large crew as well. So, the general mess, or the dining room for the general crew, is very crowded at the current mealtime.

At one side is the ward room, which is for the officer’s meals, and is wrapped in a serious atmosphere. It gives a calm impression only on a warship.

“Captain on deck, attention!”

One officer raised his voice and at the big table where the officers sat down and they, together, all fixed their posture.

Suddenly, a single man walked into the room and took a seat at the head of the table.

The man wore the same black naval uniform as the other officers.

At a glance, you could tell he was young.

But, this is because of his ambiance. He held his back straighter than the young ones around him, and he had ambition.

His body is also small, but he has the dignity to have one not care about that.

Rather than dignity, it might be right to say it's his dependability.

By appearance, no matter where you look, he was the type of man who looked like a good person. He is Kaburagi Norio, the rear admiral. He is in command of the UN peacekeeping Force Dispatch fleet.

"At ease!"

"At ease!"

"Oh, it's fine. Let's hurry and finish eating. Everyone eat up. Oh, today is Friday. Is it curry?"

It was only so formal at the beginning, then Kaburagi stopped the officer shouting the order.

He didn't think there was any real reason to continue the formalities. It was very like him to think that there would be disappointment if there were officers with a smile and he didn't crack down.

"You're the same as ever, Commander Kaburagi."

The clear voice rang throughout the ward room. Seated in a chair across was the fleet command staff's Chief of Staff, Commander Shuuji Katou.

Here, in the middle of a lineup of officers, he was an awfully conspicuous person.

The man, wearing elliptical glasses with no frame, perhaps it was due to the angle, but they reflected a lot of light, allowing him to be famous for being able to be spotted from far away on deck.

Because of his baby face, you would think he could pass as a high school student. It really separated him from all the sordid and gritty faces all around him.

If you were given the officer seat of Chief of Staff based upon seniority, you couldn't see it at all on him.

He was Commander Kaburagi's right arm (or right-hand man). That was why he was seated so close to Kaburagi.

"I'm the Commanding Officer; if I say it's fine, then it's fine."

The broadly grinning face of Kaburagi was as if it were full of the vigor of a young man. He didn't pay any mind to the varied thoughts surrounding him as he lifted the curry to his mouth.

While no one gave him any consideration, Kaburagi turned to lunch, one of the very few pleasures aboard a war ship, and it had the vibe of a peaceful meal.

Only one person, Chief of Staff Commander Katou alone, spoke concerning his report.

"According to the weather monitor squad, the typhoon which developed yesterday is changing course from its original route.

"Oh, then that's a relief. Is there anything else?"

"No, nothing in particular. Ah, yesterday I had quite the strange dream."

"Dream...?"

He did his best to keep a calm composure, then Kaburagi had to look away from Katou.

"Yes. I can't remember it well, but...There was this girl who grew wings on her back, and then blood started pouring..."

Everyone in the ward room turned their eyes to look at the man telling such an odd tale. And, certainly, Katou also put on that bitter laugh of his.

"Haha. Sorry, this certainly is not a story to tell in the middle of lunch."

But, Kubaragi wasn't going to let the story be dropped like that.

"That's strange, isn't it?"

"Hm?"

"I also saw it. A winged girl being made a sacrifice."

"Eeeh?! Is, is that true?"

As if he were surprised from the bottom of his heart, Katou opened his eyes, full of curiosity, very wide.

A sacrifice...ah, it probably was indeed that sort of situation, he groaned.

Dream, winged girl, sacrifice, and the same dream being shared by his subordinate, eh?

“Commander, it’s not as though you’re just fatigued?”

The senior officers looked at one another. After hearing such a strange story, of the medical officers interjected.

“Yes, for it’s been a painful schedule until now...”

“Ibuki” was applied to the length of the voyage.

What was meant by these words was concerning the time spent on this current fleet. This fleet was organized and assigned a mission.

Let’s go back six months ago.

Due to conflict with a nation in Africa, a UN facility had been hit with much terrorism in quick succession, so it was decided to actively dispatch troops for the UN peacekeeping mission led by the U.S. And Britain, but there were not enough troops.

This led to a request for support to nations allied with these nations. Who else responded but Japan?

They sent out the Maritime Self-Defense Force in addition to the state-of-the-art “Ibuki”, equipped with high-grade class helicopters, and it has been pulling up large supply ships as support.

The plan was to make an attack on land.

“The armed forces of the added nations is for humanitarian support,” and other such words are fine to hear, but in the end it is just political speculation. Still, the Ministry of Defense’s luxurious arrogance led to wanting to just score points as a sort of income. That’s what kind of dispatch it was.

They thought if the Self-Defense Force should fail at some point, they’d cover for the responsibility on the field, they’d say they were against Kaburagi’s own order something like that, probably. “Darn it!” thought Kubaragi, who devoted himself to this theater of battle.

He didn’t know if they’d help or if he’d have to carry this burden, but because the worst possible event IS possible, the weapon ammunition has been full

even until the present day.

The maritime Self-Defense Force is using the Aegis Destroyer “Ibuki” and a 10,500 ton class helicopter and will aid the weaker ships.

That is, there is no mistake that they are heading to the battlefield.

Within the politicians, there are those who take pleasure in saying “Japan can boast of a naval fleet among the best in all the world,” but there’s no reason to make up such a naval fleet so optimistically. But, Kubaragi has a duty to not be so pessimistic.

He liked the field. If it were possible, he would like to ride the vessel until retirement. If the vanguard isn’t leading the field, I’ll just have to take the lead instead. That is Kubaragi’s belief. This personality is his misfortune and an even greater promotion would be a great sight of despair.

But, at present:

If Captain Kubaragi and I were to see things normally, we would have noticed the danger signal. The medical squad warned us.

“Drop it.”

Lieutenant Colonel Katou started poking fun with the marine troops, but Kubaragi finished it.

...This was also a tad odd.

Well, he is the youngest weapons officer in history and was the type of problem child to never hold back: he’d completely annihilate an enemy’s troops in virtual target practice, so perhaps it’s only natural.

That, and the head Chief of Staff was picked from his home troops. Yet if the one picked were anyone else, not a word would be said against it.

While Kubaragi gave a small laugh, he ate the legendary traditional curry that one never gets tired of, no matter how much you eat.

Even if you are riding on the vessel for 30 years, the familiar taste calms your spirit. This was a very special moment, he felt, during the lunch meal. If the dispatch destination became a destination for war, you won’t be able to keep such a daily, ordinary occurrence.

While thinking about these things, Kubaragi had already ruminated over Katou's story.

...A girl having wings on her back. She had the atmosphere of one who had some sort of request. Yes, a very pressing atmosphere.

At some point in time, Kubaragi forgot about eating and focused on only one thing. Just because they saw the same dream, it doesn't mean that anything will happen. Despite this, he had an uneasiness about the whole thing. It was probably a sailor's intuition.

"Yes...it was you guys, right?"

"Eh?"

You could hear a young girl's voice.

Instantly, there was confusion, maybe it was just a whispering of their imagination. However, soon, Kaburagi, taken aback, raised his face.

The spoon Katou left in his curry was raised to his mouth as he focused on only one point. Kaburagi also looked at his line of sight. As he did, he could see a young girl wearing sheer silk.

"Wha-?"

She was on the big table, in between where the officers face each other.

What I saw in my dream?!

Upon his back, Kubaragi had a stream of cold sweat. It was seething with sweat.

With a clatter, the present officers got out of their chairs and stood up.

"O-oy! Who are ya'? How did you invade this ship?!"

"Commander, please step back!"

A single subordinate asked this, but Kubaragi just started at the young girl intently.

"Yo-you are...!"

He most certainly saw the girl yesterday.

In his dream.

She had long silver hair down to her waist. In between gaps in the strands of hair, you could peep through the white silk dress to see geometrical design that ran throughout her body like a tattoo. And, on her back were large, white wings. Then, she opened her eyes.

“I have to entrust something to you guys.”

Kubaragi couldn't understand the meaning of her words, and Katou started to ask the girl a question.

“Entrust something? Exactly what are you entrusting?”

Asking in a serious tone one question, Katou's loneliness was taken aback by the gentle look in the girl's pupils.

“Sorry...”

“O, oy!”

Once again, the girl closed her eyes. Kubaragi felt something. Suddenly, he raised his voice to speak.

That instant, the ward room became dark. However, it wasn't that the light went out. Everyone in the room started to fall into an uncomfortable sweat.

The young girl opened her mouth to sing a song with a curious tune. And, a faint green light came out from under her feet. Then, you could see some sort of pattern begin to wriggle around her body.

Katou, who was at Kubaragi's side, fixed his eyes on that light.

“A magic circle?” Katou had a hobby of reading occult magazines, and this scene looks like an imitation of one.

“What are you doing?? Stop!”

One of the young officers moved to stop her and set her on the table. He thought he could stop her since she's just a single unarmed girl.

“That's bad, stop!” Kubaragi felt a bad premonition and shouted. Swaying, the space of the wardroom was distorted.

Since this situation was a feeling never before had by any of the men, they all

thought it might be some illusion due to the poison gas of a terrorist.

Continuing, a darkness like tar seemed to overflow from the pattern on the girl. That is, it first got on the white tablecloth, and really she made the wardroom in its entirety seem hidden in sight.

“Haugh!” The darkness was growing closer to the operations officer, and at this rate would completely surround him. “Aaaugh!”

“Sa-save...stop!”

Almost as if moving with a purpose, that slimy darkness swallowed up the officers who tried to escape. It was like a scene from Hell. To be eaten by darkness!

The men felt a terrible dread in the depths of their instincts.

“Hyaaaaaugh!? Help-!” Katou, for whom it was too late to run, faded into the darkness with a scream.

The last one remaining in the wardroom, Kaburagi, as commander, put up a calm resistance as the darkness closed in upon him. He gave himself the duty of protecting his subordinates. He gripped the boat phone on the wall near the entrance.

“He-here, in the ward room, Kaburagi...all the members...a life boat...”

He gave the order to save everyone, but was then covered by the darkness. In the vessel, the wardroom would be considered to be classified as a rather large room if you enter it, but compared to other rooms it was rather narrow. You’d be caught up in darkness very soon after it starts chasing you.

“I repeat...all the members...Ku-”

It wasn’t just the ward room; the darkness made its way to the windows and the exit, clamoring its way past them. It was going to engulf the entire vessel, no, the entire fleet.

When everything in sight was covered in darkness, Kubaragi went to issue a last-ditch effort, a command calling for extreme measures: to sink this ship, the “Ibuki”.

But, in his fading consciousness, the hand he was using to grip the boat phone

lost its power, and he fell into the depths of despair.

Part 3

“Uh...” Facing up after falling, Kuze opened his eyes.

At first, he mistakenly thought he just fell down face-first. That was because his vision was obstructed by something. He thought this “something” was the deck of the ship. But, he was wrong.

He could feel the cold sensation of the deck on his back. It was like he fell facing the sky. What was blocking his field of vision was like a fog all around him.

“Uuh?!”

Hm, what is this feeling of an evil in the fading blackness about? He raised his upper body and tried to survey his surroundings. He remembered that the mystery darkness came from the Aegis destroyer “Ibuki”.

Before that, he was, yeah, he was supposed to check on the situation on the upper deck. Yes, it was before he got swallowed up by the darkness.

They were worried that the tied-down vehicles would get their fastenings loosened, so he was going to check on that. He was in charge of managing those vehicles, but thanks to the darkness, he only got through about half of them before majestically running out of there. That’s the extent of his memory. Was he still in the middle of dreaming? The fog surrounding him was just some fantasy, was all he could think about this ordeal.

To make matters worse, no one else was there. The warship’s stern was nearby, and as the vessel continued on, he could see the sake of the ship. He could also hear the sound of the engine. Right now, this transport vessel wasn’t some ghost ship, it was the real ship he was riding on. For some reason, this realization gave him peace of mind.

“So, just what the heck...”

Could it be he is in some illusion, all by himself? Anyhow, he’s just got to confirm that his subordinates are safe.

The fact he can open his eyes and try to stand in this deep fog is good, the fact that the blackness was fading was good, but none of this was normal.

Somehow, he managed to stand up. No place hurt on his body. The slight headache started going away, and now he was completely awake.

Soon, things would be fine, right? Kuze hurriedly continued for the hatch of the ship.

Lu...lull... (TRANSLATOR NOTE: These are sound effects representing a lullaby. I couldn't think of how else to put it other than this)...

The tune of a lullaby reached his ears. It was as if it restrained him. He stood still and turned to face the direction of the voice.

The voice was probably from the direction of the reef; from starboard it was probably about 200 meters out.

"What? A song?" Who would be singing? This is supposed to be the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

He had binoculars prepared for a survey of the deck already in hand. The world beyond the lens of the binoculars began to reflect into his eyeballs. Lull....lullaby....

As the transport vessel continued moving, he saw it clearly on the reef disappearing in the middle of the ocean.

"That...that can't be?!"

On that reef he saw the figures of people. At first, he thought it was some seals or some other marine life lying down, but that wasn't it———

Kuze seemed to freeze as he gazed at the sinking reef like those at the sendoff did for him and the fleet.

"Second lieutenant Kuze! You were here!"

Suddenly, from behind, a female voice came out. When he swung around, there was a young woman. In terms of years, she looked to be in the latter half of her 20s, and she wore the same Ground Self-Defense Force camo uniform as Kuze.

“Company Commander Ita?!”

While he looked at the figure of the one who spoke to him, he shouted that name. Itai Kaori of the Ground Self-Defense Force first-class. Kuze is in the company of which she is the commander.

She was in the Woman’s Self-Defense Force while Kuze was in the Defense Academy and was his upperclasswoman. She was a frightening upperclasswoman, back at the academy.

That aside, it’s good to meet another person. And someone I have a relationship with, this is good. While confirming who it was, Kuze ran up to where she was. While running, he kinda got surprised and got his foot caught, and tripped.

“He-here’s my report!”

“Wh-why?”

She winced at Kuze’s pained expression. Her shoulder-length hair swayed in the ocean breeze. While silent, nothing distracted from her beautiful looks and figure.

“Cu-cu-cu-currently, on the starboard of the mother ship, is a group of mermaids!”

Desperately, he pointed into the direction of the mermaids.

She would have tried to follow his finger to see what he was talking about if such thick fog didn’t make it impossible to see so far. Kuze also realized this, and was dumbfounded. That was until his superior put her hand on his shoulder and made an expression like “don’t worry about it”.

“Calm down, Second Lieutenant Kuze. Where does it hurt?”

“Huh?”

“You’re still confused after the shock of being knocked out. It’s OK; I’ll bring you to the medical treatment room. Can you walk?”

“I-I’m not mistaken!”

“I’m sure. Let’s hear the full story on the way to the medical room.”

Ordinarily, such rare kindness would make Kuze at least a little happy, but he was too impatient in this situation.

“Please wait! It really is true!”

“Yes, yes, I understand. Come on, let’s get back to the inside of the ship.”

She had never won in hand-to-hand combat until today. She firmly grasped his arm and slowly pulled him in with her.

Gradually, Kuze’s screaming voice got smaller and smaller. Soon, the figure of the pair would disappear from the deck and silence would once again reign over the ocean deep.

The white wake, caused by the propeller, would be the scene of something bubbling up at sea level.

You could hear the sound of water next to the wake; it was a soft, delicate noise, but most certainly there. It was the sound of a number of young girls coming out of the sea, revealing their faces. It was so delicate a sound, no one noticed.

They moved forward with no clear purpose into the stern of the transport vessel. The girls number 3 all together and looked a bit like dolls on display with their heads inclined slightly. With worried expressions, they returned to the depths of the ocean. Their “fins” could be seen when they jumped back into the wake caused by the propeller.

Chapter 2: Argentavis

Part 1

She liked the feeling of flying, of cutting the wind. The eyes on the inside of the goggles grew wide, as though it took in the blue ocean deep. She felt the sea breeze of summer. No matter what terrible state the world may be in, it felt like summer here. The girl—Rarona—had her crimson hair combed upwards, giving the appearance of blood pouring out. Though she's a woman, it didn't reach her shoulders this way, and though it's a trivial matter, the girl came to like this hair style. If her hair were too long, it'd become a pain against strong wind during her flight time. Though such a short hair cut didn't have a hint of female-ness, she did have a sort of wild charm. With such fierce determination showing on her face, you couldn't be able to quickly tell that she was someone so young. The wide ocean under her similarly blue pupils of her eyes didn't have a single spot that was cloudy. It was a clear day today.

There was just something she wanted to confirm. She had checked many times during her flight, but for some reason she still felt she had to confirm it. It was like a habit by now. The girl flying in the sky dropped an odd object, and so the habit-like work to confirm the thing might seem natural. First, on her body she wore a light half-breastplate that is easy to forget about. It's more of a formal way of giving a distinction among the military forces. In the middle of the breastplate, there is a silhouette of a bird along with a lance and a dagger crossing each other: the crest of the "Flying Light Armor Unit" shone brightly. On the hip of her short, olive-colored pants is a dagger for combat. She was wearing navy blue knee socks that needed replacing soon. They were there to protect her legs during long flights.

"Huh!" She controlled the reigns with excitement. Despite only being 15 years old, she's already used to the movements. Currently, she is flying in the

refreshing air. Transporting her was a “bird.” Even though I say “bird”, it is not a normal kind of bird. It is a huge species of bird on par with dragons, at least in terms of wing span.

Argentavis. People ride on it, it flies people, and it is a giant bird. It has the outward appearance of a falcon, and the intelligence to match the dignity of such a look, in spades. They are trained by military forces all over the world, and are called by the familiar name “giant birds” by the public. Though small, Rarona had the willpower to ride this tool of transportation for a very long flight—she had a lot of that sort of willpower. Compared to a dragon, this was cheaper and easier to get your hands on, so it opened to the public many new ways of travel and reconnaissance. However, if anyone tried to sell a lot at once, they would also see a lot of military forces at once as well. Rarona’s generic military unit would be one such group. The Forces of the United Kingdom of the Mariisua Southern Sea: “Flying Light Armor Unit” is the formal title. Scattered about the Continent of Demeter are islands. One territory among these is a military state, which is Rarona’s mother country. In the mountains of a little territory of the great continent is where she was raised, and she has always loved the sea. That’s why she joined the patrolling company. She can’t be bitter about being able to enjoy a nice, quiet job.

“Tail! This feels great!”

She straddled the back of the giant bird, which she used as a saddle; ever since joining the forces, she’s wanted to talk with her “partner”.

The bird Tail responded back with a high-pitched animal cry which sounded like “kyue!”.

“Yup, yup. That’s right!” Rarona crackled and laughed. From the cry of the animal to the expression, she understood what the animal meant. This is because of the ability she picked up with her more natural upbringing, and there’s a whole story as to how she became a rider of the great bird.

Mariisua is the name of the Ocean Empire’s corps, but within the Demeter continent, there is a large mountain range near the border. There, the mountain people, including Rarona, grow with the birds together. Due to the rugged terrain, the giant birds were an important mode of transportation. On

top of this, ever since her family was killed 10 years ago in a border dispute, the birds have been her family. To her, to speak with her family feels natural. To use this power, she was taken in by the military force and she gets to view this bird as her partner. To those around her, this ability seems rather incredulous, but to her it is a very honest and serious skill.

Her expression suddenly became very grim. She noticed that the scent of the salt changed. No, rather than the smell of the salt, the mood of the location is what changed. As if the atmosphere heavily coiled about. She confirmed where the horizon was, and drew closer to the part of the water where the mist was.

“Just a little more and the ‘mermaid sea’, eh?”

We’ve flown quite the way, she murmured. There, she decided where the large expanse of an evil water, where the fog never settles. It is where those who ran from the “war of great inheritance”. We don’t know why exactly they are still settled in this particular area of the ocean. Research has ceased in that area. The Royal Cultural Academy’s researchers concluded that they wanted to protect the closed-off environment they made. That’s the strongest theory. Anyhow, it’s a place of water in which no one has wandered and lived to return from it. To stop research was an inevitability. In the deep of that sea, was the end of our world. Fantastical creatures of all sorts were there, was the circulating theory.

However, as far as this girl was concerned, whatever the truth of this sea, she was fine with whatever it was. Speaking of the war of great inheritance, it was the stuff of myth: it’s a story of something over a thousand years ago. From that generation, the existence of this story has continued with details being uncertain. I wonder what will happen here? What is more important right now is the mission.

Her current mission is to patrol the territorial waters. She left from the Royal Capital and flew straight here. By noon, she was almost at the mermaid sea.

The summer wind was blowing strongly, probably because she was riding Tail. The weather controls the giant bird’s range of action and velocity, so they had good luck today. Because they were going to the mermaid sea, there was little

traffic during the trip. They got to this remote region without much interference.

But, on the other side across the sea was the Continent of Ruurie, which was relatively close, and it could become a route to invade the enemy, who was militarily important.

Enemy——— about 2 months ago, the Holy Purominia Empire destroyed Ruurie's last breakwater. The Continent of Ruurie, in a mere 5 years, was under such control. It threatened the Continent of Demeter. It's the Inheritance Empire of Filborg. To put it politely, they emphasize that they are the ones who will inherit the world. To this end, it's proudly carved in the name of its country for all to see. Rarona fixedly watched the shore on the opposite side.

That Inheritance Empire that fell into enemy hands, pretty much territory of Purominia. Of course, from this direction appeared a unit of the enemy war ships, and you couldn't see an end to them. And, since the Inheritance Empire was at war with Purominia, they were taking a certain degree of damage. It was probably about time for their rearrangement.

Again, they had made ample preparation for forces flying above the ocean trying to make a landing. That's why the next steps Rarona would take were so important, to cut the tension so they wouldn't think she was some enemy war troop. However, Rarona usually has a lighter personality, but the military forces below were being too serious. Now, without losing focus, she observed the horizon. Her eyes were good. Her giant bird's body was in the necessary condition as well, and among their troop they excelled.

“Hmm...?”

She felt a presence from the carefree mermaid sea. Her sense for living things was going of. She herself could tell. Rarona's body stiffened, and she focused her senses.

It was that instant. With an umph, an unidentifiable, piercing sound rang around her. The large sound almost made her drop her reins, but she barely was able to bear it.

And, after she appeared out of the midst of the fog, she noticed that “thing.”

“Wh-what?! That is!?”

Rarona saw the “body” under her eyes, but wasn’t able to find the words to describe it. It was something gray. That was all she understood about it.

“Could it be...a ship of the empire?”

It was above the ocean and continued in a simple direction, so a ship was she could think of to describe it. But, if it were a ship, its sail and a number of other things that are supposed to be there simply cannot be found. In spite of this, the thing was creating a white wake in the water as it floated above it, continuing to move as fast as the wind. That alone wasn’t it. The body was also very large. Even if a giant transport ship came to Mariisua’s port for trade, that wouldn’t be even half as big as this thing. Even if the Inheritance Empire is a large nation, to have this giant of a ship that is able to move without a sail...if they had such a thing, she had never heard any such information. Speaking of the Inheritance Empire’s marine force, there is a notorious band of bandits that are supposed to be centered around here, but to think that the heart of their operation would ride THIS ship is impossible.

“A...and there too?!”

Yes, there it was, coming from the mermaid sea, where nothing is supposed to leave or enter. Rarona was having quite the hair-raising experience.

“A-anyway, I gotta collect information,” she tried desperately to become calm. My mission is patrolling. If there’s something off, I just have to investigate. That’s the top priority.

“The number is 5 ships. The color is gray. They are angular, and I can’t make an approximation on the human figures on them.”

She strained her eyes and tried to see the whole situation. In regards to the ship, on the deck, the one who operates the mast’s sail might be busy or something, but there CANNOT be enough of these guys; the ship is too large and you don’t see any sails at all. Whatever it is, this must be some wonder or miracle of a ship.

“Tail! Let’s get a little closer!”

She, together with her partner, circled around and lowered to a fitting

attitude to try to get closer.

Part 2

We've got a reading on the radar! The target is 270 degrees out! The distance is 2 miles and closing! It's getting closer to the ship!"

In the information center of the Aegis destroyer "Ibuki", the operations specialists raised their yelling voices.

"Why have we been unable to detect this until now?... Ah, it disappeared into the shadow of the island, eh?"

The operations officer—the one who is responsible for being in charge of monitoring the radar and communications—he muttered these words. The department called the information center, also called the "CIC", could be said to be the brains of the war ship. It's deep inside the ship, where there are no windows and darkness is normal. It's about as wide as a classroom in a school. They use operations tools like radar and sonar, and are able to control weapons and armaments on the ship, they gather information, and manage all these things at once so that it can carry out orders.

According to the giant radar screen on the wall, there is only one target. It was while watching this that the operations officer yelled.

"What is the nationality? Quickly, check the SIF! Where is this aircraft from? Is this a private passenger plane from around Guam?"

After the incident, the fleet changed course in an attempt to go to Guam, the nearest U.S. Military base. The reason for this is that, not only was their communications from Japan cut off, they were in an emergency situation in which they were in complete silence. Due to these circumstances, the operations officer thought that maybe the aircraft could be from a Guam airport. This was a stubborn common sense expectation.

"There's no response on the applicable ATC responder! It's unknown!"

The operations specialists shook their heads. SIF (Selective Identification Feature) is a built-in device on aircraft that allow for their identification. It's not

just on war planes, it would definitely be built-in on a jumbo passenger plane. It allows for the fuselage's personal data to be transmitted to those around it. To not have a response means that this aircraft doesn't have the SIF transceiver device, so it would be an old, small private craft.

"Call out to it using the radio transmitter. Use the international frequency. Continue until we get something back."

Sending out the waves, even if it's only to one aircraft that appeared, it's good luck. However, this is when they got contact from along the warship's bridge via Sand Power. The war fleets of the Self-Defense Force use the communication device from within their warships called Sand Power. It could be called a electrical wireless phone at sea. You transform your voice into frequencies and if you were in the boat itself, you could use the communication device without a power supply. It was like a really high-quality "phone" made from 2 cans and a string, so to speak.

"CIC! Can we make contact with the target?!"

The operations officer received the warship bridge's navigator with great uneasiness. With this distance, he should probably be able to see the person on the bridge.

"CIC, you've been sending out the international frequency to the aircraft in question, but what about a response to the trouble on the other side?"

"Aircraft, you say?! Don't try to make a fool of me!"

The communication on the bridge screamed nearby.

"That's a 'bird'!"

"Bird...? To suggest an Aegis vessel's radar can't discern a group of birds..."

The Aegis destroyer's high-power 3D radar had the ability to detect and track over 200 targets. It was hard to imagine that it would fail to show so many figures from what is at best a distance of only a few kilometers. But, the reporter at the bridge of the ship yelled in return.

"You're wrong! It's not a group of birds! It's a monster of a giant bird with a wingspan of 15 meters!"

“A-a bird with a wingspan of 15 meters?!”

To this message, the navigation officer, in terror, looked at the radar screen without looking. For a moment, those on the bridge thought that they might have inhaled some sort of hallucinogenic gas in the middle of that sea covered by fog.

“Na-navigation officer, th-th-that,”

However, what the CIC monitor that presented the pictures from the vessel’s outside cameras showed left the whole room speechless.

On that screen, they saw a giant of a bird and a figure of a young girl with red hair straddling it. She was wearing some sort of armor and a sword at her waist. To all the crew members, it was like they were seeing a soldier from ancient Rome or something. The scene did appear to be something from a different generation. Looking at the monitor, it felt like the girl was scowling at the crew.

They connected a headset and all the crew members surrounding the CIC had to take that look of the girl whilst dumbfounded.

Part 3

“That unknown creature is approaching again!”

The crew members who gathered on the side of the bridge, the observation outside, which could be called the wing, followed the target’s movements with binoculars, and screamed the above into the surrounding area. Then, right above the radar mast, a giant shadow passed by.

“Wha!?”

The strong, heavy sound of the wings flapping rang about so that the power petrified the crew members. Head Chief of Staff Katou opened the hatch from inside the wing of the ship’s bridge and jumped out to follow the unknown giant of a bird.

“To think such a creature would really exist...”

“I’ve never heard anything about such a creature living in Guam!”

The navigation officer screamed with an unbelievable face.

“Can you buy a little time?”

Katou, with the wing’s observation guys prepared, used the pre-installed great distance telescope to observe the bird.

“Riding on it is...a girl? Wait, a girl?!”

The red-haired girl reflected in the optic lens didn’t seem the type to have a radio. Her clothes didn’t seem to be made with an ocean culture in mind, and she carried a sword on her waist. Because she was straddling the back of the bird with reigns in hand, one could understand that she was using the bird as one would use a horse. Furthermore, Katou thought her actions were indicative of trying to forcibly scout out an area. Her actions were different from mere curiosity; she was repeatedly circling them, so Katou felt they should prepare for a variety of attacks.

“Guys, we’ve got dragged into quite a situation with this flying thing...”

Katou became irritated with not having a way to communicate with the rest

of the crew.

Part 4

“It might be only a few, but are people here?”

When she passed the mystery ship too many times, Rarona saw the figures of many people looking up at her. From something that looked like if you put on a short and stout vest, but she couldn't investigate into it.

“Exactly what nation are these people from?”

At first, she suspected it might be people from the Inheritance Empire, but no matter how you look at it, it doesn't seem to be that this can be the case. No, only are their clothes weird, their bows and arrows or slings and aggressive actions don't look like they are from this time period.

“I don't get it. Just what are these guys?!”

She thought this as she flew around the circumference of the boat, but the answer wouldn't come. But figuring that out was probably the superior's job. She thought this, the forces went back to their base, and she made the decision that it was important to acquire accurate information without delay and return back. She took the reigns and turned around with her partner.

“What was that; I feel a terrible uneasiness, Tail...”

Regardless of her feelings, Rarona didn't understand that uneasy thing. Rather than saying that the monstrous ship is uneasy, it's more like a feeling of uneasiness that since the monstrous ship appeared, there's been an obscure nature about it.

“Let's hurry, Tail! The Royal Capital will start to hurry!”

Her partner responded with a shrill cry and then started back.

Part 5

Kue-...

The bird's cry reverberated far away.

"They left..."

Katou muttered.

The bird disappeared over the horizon, and Katou returned to the wing of the bridge. He remained silent and displayed a stern expression. Those on the bridge also did the same. The leaders were also confused, and could only say that something unbelievable happened.

But Katou was different, he desperately tried to come up with a decision concerning the current situation. Perhaps it was his sense of duty as the head chief of staff, but this is his flexibility and his high ability to adapt. He might be an exception in the rigid-thinking leaders of the Self-Defense Force.

Amongst the chatter on the bridge, Katou didn't show too much shock.

"Did you come to understand anything?"

Kaburagi, wearing the same gray life vest and helmet as the other marine force members, at some point came next to the others.

Kaburagi was one of the few people who could understand Katou, who had a knack for seemingly alien to others. Katou also has trust in him.

Eh, said Kaburagi cheerfully. At hearing his voice, the bridge settled down all at once. With everyone calm and their attention gathered, Katou cleared his throat once.

"Due to the event in the ward room with that girl, we have lost track of our present position. For about 22 hours, we've moved forward down a strayed path in the midst of a deep fog. All this time, our radio waves have been silent. Because we lost our ability to communicate, we took emergency measures to take a route for what we thought was the closest island with an American base,

Guam.”

To make sure none of his ideas sounded too strange, he took a moment to take a breath and gather his thoughts.

“However, after we left that mist there was that bird. Riding it was a girl with an unknown nationality...But this is not so very important. That’s because this is a problem from now, and is not a fundamental issue.”

He was not making an allusion to something that was solved. You can ask about the current status of the communication devices and radars from the operators of the “Ibuki” in detail.

“Even now that we’re in clear weather after leaving the fog, we’re not getting and intercepting any signals, right?”

“Correct.”

“It’s not broken?”

“We’ve checked 3 times already, but there are no problems with the machinery, sir.”

“And even the GPS, we’re not getting any response from any satellites and can’t connect to any...right?”

The operator confirmed this with his silence. Katou affirmed it.

“This...there’s no way on Earth this can happen.”

That was the strongest feeling these people here had. There was nothing blocking the signal, but letting that aside, even private radio signals and the communication satellites all being down is definitely impossible.

The impossible is happening. Since one can’t even imagine this, they had no clue as to what was the cause. Unnatural signals had vanished. It was as if the world itself had disappeared. Some found Katou’s words hard to take, and so around them started subdued conversations. But Katou didn’t care about that and continued.

“Are you aware of quantum mechanic’s ‘multidimensional (or many-worlds) interpretation’?”

“No...What’s that supposed to be?”

Kaburagi replied that he was a little surprised to hear these words he wasn’t used to hearing. Katou put his arm out and lifted his forefinger, and in a teacher’s accent started to explain.

“Taking quantum mechanic’s ‘Schrodinger’s cat’ thought experiment, there is a field of extreme logic that would suggest the world is not one, that is the hypothesis.”

“The world?”

“Yes, the world. The world we live in would have many parallel worlds in existence, and that parallel worlds would not mix, so we wouldn’t be able to perceive it, and there wouldn’t be a way to know about it.”

The ears that listened and took in Katou’s calm speaking voice found a strange power of persuasion in it.

“However, if through some way, something from another world was brought into ours, then what?”

After talking thus far, Katou fixed his glasses with his middle finger.

“That girl came to our world as an ‘observer’ and, through some ‘knotted point’ she was able to blend the worlds, and through this pulled us into a different world...how about that as a theory?...However, exactly why did it have to be us?”

“Lieutenant Colonel Katou, I can’t understand whatever the kind of story you’re telling.”

One of the leaders interrupted him with such a jeer. Katou didn’t care and continued his talk. However, it was a little quicker, since he wanted to get to the conclusion.

“In other words, if my hypothesis is correct, then...the world did not disappear,”

And, he looked around at the leaders that was lined up in a row, and declared:

“It’s the opposite. In other words, right now, this fleet has gone astray into a

‘parallel world’!”

Part 6

The Imperial Capital of the Mariisua Southern Sea United Kingdom is the “Sei Road”. (Translator Note: perhaps West? Road)

This town is a city for ocean commerce. It was full of liveliness for a castle town. You should hear the bells of the church around evening time.

Everything was dyed crimson as it was the tone color of the light god, who would chase out the evil spirits at the witching hour (not midnight).

In between the two high and low capes, on the low cape there is a lighthouse which reveals the tall Imperial Castle.

For a long time, the Imperial Castle has repeatedly been under reconstruction. According to the only remaining records, it had been expanded in reconstruction 6 times to reach its current form. People looked at the magnificent, white Imperial Castle. Without passing through the continental highway, you can't enter. The white marble castle walls had an early Kyoubo architectural style. It had 5 minarets pointing into the sky, and the rich pearl and jade pattern is very impressive in its splendor.

Rarona's unit garrison was at the opposite shore at the foot of the lighthouse to the Imperial Castle.

At the tip of the cape is a rough course with no servicing. 'Tail' the Giant Bird turned to the lodging house past the “bird housing”. Along her route, many colleagues yelled out to Rarona, who changed her expression and ran, but she didn't pay attention to any of them.

She rushed into the, seemingly-sturdy 2-story stone building, thrusting away the young guard on duty, and rushed into the unit leader's room. The inside of the modest office had an affluent, dark green-haired young woman sitting there.

The country of the “Mariia people”, who were an oceanic people, or the “Mariisua Southern Sea United Kingdom.” To see she was connected with this nation's troops, you could just look at her outfit covering her white skin. She

had on the sleeveless shirt the ocean culture demanded for ventilation, wearing the uniform of the military.

Her name is Karuda. She is a noble, as her surname will attest. However, she's never spoken about her surname in front of her subordinates. This is because the Mariisua culture didn't think that surnames were that important.

As it is called the Southern Sea United Kingdom, it holds many different cultures, people, and functions as a federation. Not finding family names important is a result of this consideration.

Now, in cases where people didn't have last names, like Rarona, when it is necessary for them to name themselves, then they would use their mother's name.

In Mariisua, the maternal cultures are usually deeply rooted, so those with an origin without intimacy, such as Rarona's mountain people, try to imitate these kind of cultures.

"What is it, Practice Officer Rarona?"

On the side of the out-of-breath Rarona who had suddenly barged in, Karuda calmly asked this question. It was a rather cold tone for a question.

What Practice Officer means is that this country's war units have classes in its ranks.

From the bottom it goes: practice officer living, practice officer, officer, unit commanding officer, unit leader...and so on.

In other words, Rarona, who is in the 2nd rank from the bottom, is in a rank for the inexperienced.

Mariisua South Sea United Kingdom's military has a military district that is separated into 3 big parts.

The Imperial Capital Defense Corps, the Domestic Forces, and the Island Patrol Forces make up the 3 camps.

The Imperial Capital Defense Corps takes this name as it is a unit formed to protect Sei road.

These contained the knights who protects the queen personally. They are the

smallest of the 3 military divisions, but their priorities are higher than the other divisions.

The Flying Light Armor Unit that Rarona and Karuda belonged to, was a part of the Imperial Capital Defense Corps.

The unit that used the Argentavis was made for specializing in reconnaissance and as runners, so they get treated as a second-rate fighting force compared to the knight group.

So, they're always scored as "Night blind (TL note: This is a pun as it literally means bird-eye)" and "(bird) Poop Droppers" [\[1\]](#) by the ground troops.

In spite of this, the unit that uses the Argentavis has an unparalleled high status. The reason the girls are looked down upon is not just that their unit is non-combative. Because officer units exists is also, by itself, another reason.

There's a large difference between the officer units and the knight unit. This may seem clear, but if half of it wasn't made up of nobles, then Mariisua wouldn't name it the Knight Unit. This is not a discussion only for this nation, no matter where it is, a difference in standards appear, and this was the custom of the higher ups in the ranks.

In a feudal society, status was absolute. So, Rarona now doesn't just fear her class, but the nobles as well. She sleeps in bed with one knee standing ready.

"Forgive me for the abrupt rudeness! But there's something I must report immediately."

Karuda removed the monocle on her right eye. Rarona had heard of a rumor that she injured her eye during practice, to the point of bleeding. Karuda's movements were all very refined.

She's definitely a noble, Rarona thought.

Over her black military uniform, Karuda had a summer overcoat on, with an emblem of a unicorn, almost as if she was a student of the Church of the Moon. No matter how much you know it is an overcoat for the summer days, Rarona just kept feeling it was a mourning dress. Maybe the rumors that she had lost her lover were true.

While waiting for the unit leader's response, Rarona thought about these things and realized the unit leader's squinty pair of eyes. Karuda had a glint in her eyes that showed of a noble amethyst.

"Fine. Briefly."

Rarona took the momentum, lifted her face, and quickly talked on and on about what happened that afternoon. About the big affair concerning whatever appeared in the Mermaid Sea. About how their nationality was unknown and they looked like castles with how huge they were, and how they were 5 iron boats. Karuda, who never let down her calm noble expression, upon hearing this report, started to faintly sweat.

"I can't believe it, is it the Filborg Empire?"

The Mariisua nobles did not let that insolent name of the enemy nation, the "Inheritance Empire" pass their lips.

Karuda now uttered the name of the most problematic country. She understood well that the occupation of Purominia was of no concern of hers.

"No, as far as I could tell, I don't think it is."

Rarona answered with a slightly off enunciation.

"It's like it's a ship from a whole different world,"

Rarona thought such an absurd thing. She almost laughed at the ridiculous thought, but held it in when she thought of how she's in front of a noble. As this happened, Karuda took a big breath. For a moment, it seemed she may have caught on to Rarona nearly laughing, but it doesn't seem like she did.

"...From above, no matter how little information, we've got to inform the castle."

Karuda stood up from her chair, went to the window, and looked at the sun at dusk.

"Unit Leader Karuda?"

"Hey rookie, what do you think of this current world?"

On Karuda's beautiful face appeared an agony. A grave expression that

showed deeply. It was a form she couldn't show to a subordinate. Somehow, the state of affairs was odd. Rarona felt this as well.

"That ship made of iron, the foreigners from an unknown nation...though it sounds ridiculous, Her Majesty would likely hear us out."

Karuda stroked the lance in the corner of the room.

"It looks like we can still put this in the last circular for today."

Rarona would understand what this meant, but it would take a bit of time.

What Karuda revealed was a national secret unknown to the public. Rarona felt a shock as though a demon had grasped hold of his heart. She gulped, and it made the sound of a dry throat taking a big gulp. Her superior continued.

"We have declared war with the Filborg Empire. They have given us an offer to surrender that we cannot accept. Tomorrow, we prepare for war."

Rarona's body stiffened up as she looked into those shrewd eyes.

"...Are you scared? This time, this nation will become a battlefield."

She said it as if testing her subordinate.

"No!"

But, Rarona shook her head, which is what the firm Karuda focused upon.

"I am prepared to fight! I am also a soldier for Mariisua! I won't let the damages of war from 10 years ago happen again! I am ready to beat down the empire's forces!"

Karuda squinted her eyes.

"...You, you're from the mountains along the border, aren't you?"

"Y-yes!"

"I see..."

Karuda had a sort of satisfaction seeing her subordinate's vigorous expression.

Ten years ago, the mountain ridge near the border was found to hold resources, so the neighboring country started a fight over it, making a border

dispute. That time, a lot of villages got involved and got burned down.

That was also why Rarona lost her family and home. Karuda, who could sense this, hanged her head a little. And in a small voice Rarona couldn't hear, she murmured.

“Won't let it happen again, eh...”

Karuda thought she was a little jealous of the genuineness of the red haired girl in front of her. A fire that has cooled-down, I don't have anymore. That's reminiscent. But, she shook off these idle thoughts and ordered Rarona.

“Practice Officer, first thing in the morning, go give this report at the castle. You are my underling, so you will come with me.”

Rarona's eyes were spinning in confusion at the surprising orders.

“Eh? Uh, b-but, I'm a commoner, I can't so easily get an attendance at the castle...”

“It's a time of crisis. If you stay by my side and don't separate from me, I also won't mind. I might have to tell your story to toe the mark, who knows.”

Karuda said this, and looked at the window. The sun at dusk was sinking below the other side of the horizon. There were frightening things on the other side of that horizon. In spite of this, the scene was very beautiful.

[\[1\]](#) Yes it's correct. Not a mistake.

It's a Japanese Pun (Joke) but as translating Japanese Puns (Joke) is no easy task. That's the end result.

Part 7

“Ah”

Inside the transport vessel, the Ground Self-Defense Force members tread upon their living quarters and Kuze felt the gaze of his subordinates.

But, the gathered gaze quickly dispersed. Here and there, it seemed as if they decided to act as though they didn't notice Kuze. Kuze continued unwaveringly, stepping up to the three-tiered bunk bed.

“Anyways, stakes!”

Through his sanpaku eyes (TL note: eyes in which the white space above or below the iris is visible; is believed to indicated either bad diet or an attraction to violence and misfortune), hiding in the covers on the top bunk of the three-tiered bunk bed, private Ichinose glared out.

These bad meaning men “bet juice” over whether “Platoon Leader Kuze will talk about seeing mermaids.” So, the platoon crew finally got to see who they were waiting on. In the Self-Defense Force they had a tradition called “jurock” in which the loser of rock-paper-scissors would give the winner his juice.

This betting gave rise to this type of bet. The idea slowly came to Ichinose but his hand was at Kuze's lower back and continued applying pressure silently (TL note: I think the context of this is he's trying to avert Kuze's eyes from what will happen).

“Please pay up...”

He grabbed someone's helmet from somewhere and filled it with goodies. But even if you say goodies, it was a completely understood line-up.

It had the stack of confectioneries, and of course the squid and beef jerky with some alcoholic beverages mixed in within them. There was not a sense of unity in everyone about it. So there was no real reason to make a bet. Yes, those who didn't have to give up their wages quickly presented a fake.

“You're kidding, right?”

The usually good-natured Kuze was looking furious. This betting was a violation of conduct. And the joke of the bet was a higher-up: himself.

“Eh, uh...well?”

His senpai crew members asked Ichinose, who would help them, “You’re an accomplishment, right?”, and Ichinose moved his eyes to look for help. Those senpai also asked the same to the senior non-commission officers. They said in desperation,

“Se-second Lieutenant Kuze, please think of this in a balanced way. To say that mermaids don’t exist is respected as perfectly good judgment, right?”

To the non-commission officer’s words, the gathered crew members did many nods of approval.

“But, the truth is that there was that giant bird!!”

Kuze exploded in frustration over his own testimony being treated as thoughtless words. OF course, he couldn’t rebut the subordinates.

“But, such a creature to fly in the the skies is impossible.”

“Yup, yup”

The subordinates who came from a rural area were able to say such things in a care-free manner. It would have been good if this had stopped, but Ichinose caught onto the mood and continued.

“But, that’s also like you, Second Lieutenant Kuze! Not just mermaids but this bird too”

“People ride on this bird, yet it’s still unbelievable!”

They didn’t believe that mermaids were spotted on the deck, but that was in a confusion caused by getting hit in the head, and that he was a “heartbroken leader” and his grudges grabbed onto the confusion and made him imagine mermaids.

“Well, after all, Platoon Leader Kuze only knows how to get rejected, so of course when he hit his head on the deck he’s going to say ‘I see mermaids,’ and everyone would worry about him.”

“Of course he’d be made into the joke of the bet, anyone would do the same, silly.”

Ichinose butted his head with a gong. He hit the right side of his head, so it was painful. It shook, and the right hand he used to grab it shook in pain. Ichinose’s right side writhed in pain.

And———

“...Platoon Leader Kuze, you’re pretty full of energy, eh?”

You could hear the voice of a woman from the rear. That instant, everyone’s faces froze.

“!? Platoon, attention!”

Kuze swung his head around, and you could hear the sound of the platoon commander’s heels. Ahead of his swung head was a female figure of the Self-Defense Force who is laughing at the reasons behind all the laughter.

Captain Itai Kaori. That is, the company commander. Despite the air conditioner working in the ship, a gross amount of sweat ran down not only at Kuze’s back but at everyone else too. To see this person laugh usually means that something frightening will happen.

Back in the Defense Academy,

“Hey, escape from your lodging and run to the convenience store to buy some new sweets. Oh, by the way, if you say they were sold out and return empty-handed, the instructors will find out that you escaped.”

And, whenever she gave out those orders, there would be that smile. By the way, the new sweets had to get a taxi to collect these goods from a different area limit.

There’s not a single member in the troop that doesn’t know how much of a sadist Commander Itai is. In that place, it felt like you were walking with the tension of running on the thin ice of a frozen lake. And below that frozen ice was a deepness like that of the Mariana Trench, and that piranhas and sharks swam there.

“May I speak with you a bit, Kuze-kun?”

“R-roger.”

It was as if you could hear the sighs of relief from the subordinates.

“Good work! Second Lieutenant Kuze!”

“Don’t lose at the half-way management!”

“Die a noble death worthy of a man!”

“I wonder if he’s fine with spreading his ashes at the sea?”

Remember all of us after this. Kuze’s whole face was smiling at this make-shift send off and thought he seemed dependable towards his subordinates. And, while the cold sweat poured, he followed Kaori’s back in front of him.

They left the hallway, and effortlessly she handed him a file. He hurriedly took it, and scanned over it as they walked. At first, Kuze couldn’t understand the meaning of any of the information listed. All he understood was that there was some sort of list of supplies the platoon was supposed to carry for a mission.

But, something was clearly strange with the contents. Because there was a whole lot of live ammunition in the list of supplies. And, it was a quantity he couldn’t possibly think that it was just for training or maneuvers.

“...A-at this time, a large-scale live ammunition drill?”

Kuze asked the unthinkable. But, of course, they weren’t going to use up the whole armament reserve on training.

While walking, Itai answered.

“No.”

“Th-then why so much armaments?”

“Because we’re going out to a real war.”

Of course. The woman who could say that looked behind and glanced at Kuze. He stood still, looking at the file, dumbfounded.

“Real war?”

The man who had gotten used to the organization built for this purpose, he just listened to the unrealistic sound of those words.

Part 8

The morning sun was coming up. The location of the flight deck is in the stern of the “Ibuki”, in the helicopter hangar.

This is where the “Ibuki” ship-borne planes are, and where the anti-submarine SH-60 K Sea Hawk was being prepared for takeoff. It was rare for the Self-Defense Force; it was painted white and gray and prominently featured the round sun of Japan’s flag.

In terms of a combat aircraft, it was sort of beautiful. A man in a pure white uniform boarded the plane. The one giving the dispatching troops their orders was the Head Chief of Staff Katou. He came to the send-off. Kaburagi did too.

Since the bird incident, thereafter all actions have to be closely inspected, and it was decided that the reconnaissance members should gather for departure. It was decided that if the Aegis destroyer’s radar is right, they detected a huge continent where the island of Guam should be.

Obviously, it was an ocean area that they didn’t know. To analyze the situation, this was an affair that the reconnaissance team couldn’t avoid. At first it was just the helicopters, actually it was just the land forces that were supposed to go on the reconnaissance plan, but Katou by his own hand stepped forward to lead; he’d organize the reconnaissance squad and lead it.

Ultimately, the one to make the call is Commander Kaburagi. He made the big decision to give the one he believed in as his right arm the permission to go with this plan.

“I’ve screened one platoon from the land force’s escorts.”

“That’s reassuring!”

Their voices not disappearing under the helicopter’s down wash and engine noise, they spoke really close to each other’s ears. While Katou laughed, the wind caused by the helicopter made his regulation cap start flying off his head as the string on his jaw loosened.

Following the Aegis Destroyer’s oblique stern is the singular sailing transport

vessel. Sailing in a warm weather, the land forces' camo helicopters and the equipment next to it, along with armament packages were checked by 30 members of the land squad.

Katou's earlier briefing was suddenly remembered. Indeed, the name of the commander of the land forces was Second Lieutenant Kuze. To protect him and his helicopter, this one platoon prepared 32 elites, and that was truly reassuring. Originally, the plan was for just these 32 to be doing the reconnaissance, he wondered if he might get in the way, who knows?

"You listen here, seriously don't try to do anything reckless."

"Yeah, I totally understand!"

He gave a thumbs-up. Kaburagi gave a strained laugh. A normal commander would probably trust that everything would be fine with this guy. Actually, when they met it was like that.

But when Katou met the Marine Self-Defense Force that was mocked for having a vain tradition, he didn't let it change his character. The meaning in this is that he has strong character. The light and flexible Self-Defense Force still doesn't exist. What's more, in the Rim of the Pacific Exercise, with just the "Ibuki" destroyer, America was annihilated in an excellent display thanks to him.

Was he an eccentric or a genius, perhaps both? That's the marine force member Katou. In this unusual situation, he's the only one adaptive enough to look for a solution. He wasn't going to go out like a thickheaded old man, Kaburagi felt.

"A parallel universe, eh..."

Kaburagi was still incredulous. The girl with wings who appeared inside the ward room with a black something. And, then, a giant bird that person was riding. That alone was clearly seen and reported, but are we sure we're not mistaken? Somewhere in his heart he felt doubt. I've lived too long, I don't have any more space for new things, is how he felt. On this point, Katou was different.

It's probably not an exaggeration to say that he is the only one that this

mission can be entrusted to.

“We’re relying on you.”

Kaburagi fixed his eyes on the young man, onto the next generation whom he’d leave the new Self-Defense Force too.

“Understood. Leave it to me.”

In a rare sight, Katou gave a salute with an extremely serious look, and closed the side door. Again, he acknowledged Kaburagi’s superiority.

That young staff officer who didn’t care much about the organization’s framework, he is the one who flew off as the commanding officer.

There’s no other headquarters as odd as this one. Kaburagi left the aircraft hangar, and the helicopter flew off into the sky. For Katou’s protection and to protect the marine helicopter he’s flying in, he would meet up with 3 aircrafts taking off from the ground force’s transport vessel.

The land force’s deployment was of the UH-60 JA Black Hawk. The marine forces’ Sea Hawk and the Black Hawk were of the same derivation form. In other words, they were like siblings. Katou gazed at the form of his flying accompaniment from the land forces.

Black Hawk was called “Rokumaru” by the land forces.

Two pilots and 11 other soldiers boarding a plane at once being feasible, Kuze separated his team of 32 into 3 different groups to board 3 different aircrafts. In a plane, you had 11 people sitting face-to-face.

They could be seated differently, but this way makes it easier to prepare any plans.

The force members were packed into a cabin rubbing soldiers before. They’ve been in light luggage trucks filled with goods and supplies with nowhere to stand. But, the Black Hawks were strong enough to carry the people and supplies at a distance of 1,200 kilometers.

The Ground Self-Defense Forces has their helmets and communication devices, their bullet proof vests, and in their duffel bags they got out and put on their joint protectors. They had a cartridge belt on their waists to put their

bayonet and reserve bullets and carry full magazines. It was a full armament.

They carried a type 89 5.56 mm rifle. That is the formally adopted domestic forces' assault rifle. It's this squad's support artillery, and they held a MINIMI Light Machine Gun. Kuze checked the wireless radio while also speaking with the 3 separate groups in their helicopters.

"Listen, our mission is recon from the sky, and in the worst-case scenario, get in the transport for the white helicopter. I don't think we'll have to do anything out of the ordinary, but sincerely don't drop your guard. You'll be carrying large amounts of ammo and explosives, so be on lookout for discreet warnings from control. We'll quickly confirm through the safety device after all. Don't put any cigarettes or gum or the like into your rifles' cylinder. Since the instant you thrust anything like that into it, it won't work right. If you're missing as much as one bullet, there will have to be a written apology. O-K! Then, let's do the safety chant!"

"I will confirm safety to the base, and will not get any serious injuries!"

Kuze had said the most important things he could as the leader to his subordinates, and made a bitter smile.

The Self-Defense Force was the type of organization that would make a big problem out of an empty shell or a single supply item during practice. And, the government and the citizenry would shout, "Safety First" lately, and there's a growing sensibility to accidents during practice.

Before being an organization of military affairs, it's an organization that is a servant of the public...in other words, the Self-Defense Force, which is no different than a public government office, is like a public servant everyday as an organization.

Kuze found the radio to be in fine shape as he sat deep in the cockpit by himself. If nothing should happen, if they still have the same amount of ammunition as counted out, his report can say "No problems" and he'd stamp it, showing his approval. Then, one of the weapons used might need repair, so we'd figure out a way to pay for it with the responsible subordinate's lunch, then that would be the end of it. That would be a natural thing to do and realistic to war training, since the victorious at the end were unwavering, he

thought.

— — — And, someone's voice broke onto the radio.

"Question!"

"What is it, Private Ichinose?"

Who else would he think but Ichinose, who was sitting across him? He was a top-class marksman among his squad. So, now he had his M-24 personal sniper rifle in his hands. By the way, speaking of snipers, he hated the dark image associated with assassination concerning it. In the Self-Defense Force, they protect the allies' commander from the enemy's snipers. Kuze and Ichinose figured that the best way to defend the platoon leader was to be near him with many connections.

"By 'in the worst-case scenario', what do you suppose that would be?"

The Self-Defense Force uses the word suppose a lot. For instance, in practice, you might say what kind of battle progression do you suppose we'll start practice with/what kind of a shanty do you suppose our enemy's command center is/before we go to war, who do you suppose will be the casualties or killed in action/and you can continue all manner of the sort.

"The 'worst-case scenario' is the worst-case scenario. It's a supposed impossibility."

"A supposed impossibility you say...well, if that is true then use this time to say what you would decide to do if that happens. I suppose you'll use what's in your hand, won't you?"

"When the situation comes, I will have license to make my judgments. I will sincerely use my own decisions myself without using a gun. Fine?"

"Y-yes, roger."

It was a state of affairs Ichinose didn't understand. No, that's not limited to Ichinose. All the underlings were uneasy.

Thinking about it, outside of practice, this was their first time carrying live ammunition. Kuze felt a large amount of sweat pour on his back. Ichinose's cheeky mouth was effective. But, a lot of truth was thrust in there.

The Japanese people often avert their eyes from the essence of things, but he was looking firmly at it. Kuze's "You'll use what's in your hand" was more than just an argument for argument's sake.

Certainly it was. It wasn't just the criterion of using a weapon.

In the nation of Japan, the Self-Defense Force is more than an armed unit, they could use weapons. However, this specific matter is not answered by the Japanese people and the politicians certainly won't give an answer. So, Kuze couldn't answer Ichinose's innocent question...

"...If that time comes, I'll take responsibility. So, listen to my orders."

Kuze didn't murmur this into the radio. And, if the worst-case scenario would happen, and the weapon would need to be used and he meets the shame of shooting first, he will lose to himself he thought.

If the enemy was a country and they fought without permission, he would become an unforgivable squad leader. The spearhead's worst disgrace, no doubt.

He looked at the window. He scoffed at the way everyone was squirming as he climbed the skies, moving closer and closer to the morning sun.

Part 9

Rarona's first time going to the Royal Castle was as part of a military parade shortly after joining the army. Since then, this has happened two more times. Her legs shook under the tension.

That's because at the military parade ceremony she didn't get further inside than the plaza, but now she's going as far as the throne room. Even being Karuda's underling, this was unexpected. Usually, they'd make you wait in the antechamber.

The gazes of the Imperial Guards near the entrance is frightening. In contrast, soon, they'd have an audience with Her Majesty, with all the emotion and honor that entails.

Rarona put her head down, looking at the embroidered carpet in silence as her superior Karuda gave the report.

"Iron ships?"

They could hear the male voice of what was probably an aide to Her Majesty. It was in a mocking voice.

"And it was as big as an island, but it moved through the sea without a sail?"

This one was with the sneer of a female superior. Rarona was sullen. It seemed the reason she was brought here was to see her story get laughed at. The voice of a short male high superior came out.

"What, so near to wartime and you bring us this preposterous story and strange rumors? This isn't even worth the surprise."

Rarona was clenching her fist tightly. The ones raised in the mountains had good eyes. There's no way she'd be wrong when she got so close to such a huge object. It wasn't something she remembered after eating something bad. However, there's no way you are allowed to refute them here. I can't even raise my head as a commoner. Then, though it was a quiet voice, she could hear it was full of resolution.

"You have spoken, but what is the reason for doubting my subordinate's

report?”

“O-oh no, it’s not like we were laughing at you, Unit Leader Karuda.”

“To deride my subordinate is to deride me.”

Rarona, taken aback, raised her head.

She thought she screwed up by raising her head, but luckily reprimand did not come. In the throne room, in front of so many influential people, Karuda didn’t flinch at all. She was dignified. However, to these prideful words, the place froze. It wasn’t unnatural.

A mere unit leader opposing them wasn’t good company. She angered and showed bare a few chancellors by opening her mouth.

However, a certain someone’s voice saved her from this predicament.

“This is a deeply interesting information.”

This was the voice of a crafty young woman. Everyone in the room was surprised. That is, the voice came from none other than the person sitting on the throne. She had her legs crossed as she hid her small face with a marvelous folding fan that she held herself as she looked down on everyone.

She was wearing a transparent, white Southern-kingdom style dress which showed her brown skin. Her blonde hair lay on her back in 2 different bundles. Those red pupils, rare in the kingdom, were the proof of her royalty. Despite her seemingly no older than 15, no, 13, she can make an adult cower in fear at her solemnity.

Her name was Hamieea. She is the queen who rules this nation. (TL Note: Hamieea talks with an old-timey, distinct, and dignified speech that is difficult to replicate)

“Y-your Majesty Queen Hamieea...”

The country’s top showed interest in Karuda’s story. With just this, Karuda’s role got reversed. However, Karuda herself couldn’t hide her surprise. Rarona was flustered.

“And, those iron ships...”

With a noise, she folded her fan she was fanning herself with and asked a question

“To what nation do these ships belong, and what was their aim in deciding to suddenly show them, Karuda?”

And, she got up from the throne and walked. A cold wind entered into the throne room, and swayed the sheer silk angel’s raiment of the celestial maidens. It’s not as though the queen was going to come meet her or anything like that.

“I will graciously speak, your Highness.”

Karuda was at a loss for a decision as to what to say, but the queen’s loyal heart made her decide that the truth was the only thing she could say.

“We are entirely unsure and can only guess as to the true motive.”

“Hmm, I see...”

Hamieea squinted her eyes let out a small chuckle. Rather than with scorn, she heard it with admiration.

“You, you’re very capable, aren’t you?”

There were some in the place who thought that this was sarcasm. But, some thought this was praise. The correct group is the latter one. In the army, giving detailed information is of utmost importance. Without that, later decisions will be seemingly insane. Informing that you do not understand what you do not understand is honestly, by no means, a bad thing.

“Then, the things that have to be done will be decided upon.”

Hamieea showed a faint smile. It was like the smile of a plotting child, but reversely, it had the planning of an adult. The queen pointed to the emasculated Karuda with her fan.

“Karuda, you will uncover who these people are. And, if they are not an enemy, bring them in front of me.”

There was a commotion.

“These unknown creatures to Her Majesty’s presence?”

“That can’t be, your Highness!”

All the yelling aides were met by a cool face from Hamieea, and she answered them.

“Why? I do not think it is such a strange thing to invite one who is not an enemy?”

“But...”

“And, if it is some sort of fraud or swindle that he is not an enemy, and he aims for my life, is it not you who proclaims to protect me? There is no reason or meaning to leave him alone with me.”

To this, there was no rebuttal. Hamieea made a meek face and spoke to everyone.

“The Filborg Empire is our enemy. If the thousand-year empire Purominia is destroyed, our nation shall surely follow suit. These unknown beings can serve us well. It is important to verify that they are not enemies.”

She gallantly turned around and moved to return to her throne. And, in a low voice no one could hear, she continued in a mumble.

“This country needs allies. At this rate, if the neighboring countries, which are now not gathered or prepared, decided to attack us...”

She gazed at the terrace, from which you have an unbroken view of the Seiroad bay. It’s a beautiful country. It’s a nation she loved from the bottom of her heart. So, she didn’t care about appearances.

“This nation will be destroyed. Most likely, the town will be burned down and the people made into slaves.”

The Filborg Inheritance Empire’s messenger thrust in an ultimatum for the Mariisua Southern Sea United Kingdom to be made into a subject state if they’d pledge loyalty. This is a completely unacceptable thing.

To offer this trading city which is the source of most revenue for the nation to the Inheritance Empire...the Imperial Capital Agalta is where Hamieea and the family of the nobles live, and is where all military and supplies are. To make matters worse, it wasn’t believed that the empire would keep their promise of

keeping the nobles safe.

In the past, similar requests when accepted led to the empire raising taxes and nearly starting something of a revolt, taking many lives.

That DEFINITELY cannot be allowed to happen. Already, the only path left is to fight. However, to us it seems clear that there is no way to win against such a giant empire.

Because of the way the ocean is situated, today or tomorrow they shouldn't be able to attack, yet we still have no time to waste. We need to make plans with the surrounding nations to fight the empire.

But, the empire only declared war with the unfortunate Mariisua. There was little reason for the empire to start war with too many countries cooperating together. While I understand what will be tomorrow, I don't want to give up public peace.

"Unknown creatures with an iron ship...eh? Hm, we want to know if it's really a trick of the eye or what. If they're really pirates or something, we'll want to get them on our side." (TL note: probably thoughts, not spoken words)

Now, no matter what we can use, if it has any use in battle I want to use it.

She was burdened with the whole of her nation. As if it would relieve her of this burden just a little bit, she looked at the sky at the other end of the terrace.

—And.

"Wuh?"

She perked up her ears. And she saw at the other end of the sky that "something" was coming.

"What...is that?"

Without thinking, she started to walk to that side of the terrace. The aides were surprised, and in a panic chased after her.

"Y-your Majesty!? What are you doing?!"

A single minister questioned Hamieea, but she didn't stop staring at the sky. At that time, slowly, a hum-like noise became audible.

“What is that noise?”

The aides couldn't hide their shock at this noise that they had never heard before. It was a noise that struck the atmosphere. It became gradually louder and louder. The cause of the noise was getting closer and closer.

“O-oh, just what is that...?”

From the sky at the other end of the ocean, four flying things were coming that everyone there could see. If they would have been Argentavis, then the crowd would have seen a similar sight many times a day. But, it wasn't an Argentavis. To start with, Argentavis didn't make that humming noise.

“A-an apparition?”

“A giant bug?”

Many guesses were said on the terrace, but no one there knew the answer. Karuda was taken aback. That flying object was coming this way. Having the sense of responsibility of a knight, Karuda declared.

“I'll come out! You're Majesty, please come inside the room!”

But, with a deliberating face as she watched the unknown forms, Hamieea told the important nobles around her.

“Get a telescope.”

“Wha-?”

Hamieea was disappointed at the dumbfounded vassals.

“Hurry up”

A flustered maid went to get a small artisan-crafted high-grade telescope as she left the terrace normally used for gazing out at the town and the ocean.

Hamieea watched it. She deliberately observed the object flying through the sky. And she murmured concerning the thing that surprised her from the bottom of her heart.

“What is this, after ships made of iron, bugs made of iron?”

Presently, she made a daring smile.

“Karuda!”

“Yes, right here!”

Hamieea issued an order to Karuda.

“Your report, it was indeed hasty to label it as a story without merit. I want to know about those objects. Go and fulfill my command.”

“Wha-?!”

In response to her subjects’ sidelong glances, Queen Hamieea looked back to the sky.

“An iron ship that appeared from the mermaid sea, what if they were not mistaken?...This has become quite the interesting thing.”

Hamieea hid her mouth with her fan as a distorted smile surfaced upon her face

Part 10

Kuze was looking over the flight plan when suddenly the “Ibuki’s” radar showed that it got hold of land around here. Ichinose, who is sitting across of Kuze, got tired of looking for land that didn’t seem to give any indication of being there and had fallen asleep. That is when——

“I see it! It’s Land!”

The pilot screamed in joy. Kuze excitedly looked outside the window and he could clearly see and confirm the outline of the land. The land that he saw for the first time made him, without thinking, bend forward in interest...

“It’s a town...”

Kuze mumbled without really talking to anybody. The recon squad maintained a triangle formation with the land team’s Black Hawks around the marine helicopter and lowered their altitude.

One could clearly see the procedure as the helicopters lowered their altitude. There’s no mistaking that this is a town. No, from its size it seems like a major city. It had stone foundations and dark reddish-brown roofs on top of white walls. There are also wooden houses.

The screen showed a scenery that looked like the Mediterranean Sea, they thought. There were no high-rise buildings, but in the middle of the city there was something that looked like a plaza. A little before the plaza, a belfry preparing the way for a large building towered over the surroundings. From the sky, you could tell the terrain is formed like a crescent moon.

The helicopter flew above the tip of the cape where the lighthouse looking building was. The view captured by the camera is probably being shown to the crew on the vessels. Kuze thought that they would probably be in an uproar over it. Though he himself couldn’t believe it, with that mermaid sighting and the time the whole crew saw that person riding on a giant bird, this world certainly did have a feeling of discomfort, as though they didn’t fit in it.

To the cityscape unveiling in front of his eyes, Kuze and company, the Self-

Defense Force, was at a loss for words.

“Is that a castle?”

Kuze mumbled about the giant conspicuous structure. The marine helicopter decided that the highest facility would have a strong possibility of being important, so it headed in that direction. When they did, the pilot’s voice rang out.

“We’ve got a reading on the radar! In the direction of 11 o’clock, flying objects are closing in rapidly! They are neither taking nor receiving enemy or ally distinct radio waves. Commanding aircraft, shall we evade them?”

“Wha-?!”

Kuze went to cling to the side door and confirm the state of things. And, his eyes grew wide.

“It’s that bird!”

He saw a countless number of giant birds started flying out from the castle. Apparently one section of the castle was like a runway of sorts. From there, giant birds started flying after catching wind of an upward current and at once gained altitude.

Humans were riding on the backs of the giant birds. They gathered in a magnificent formation and the helicopters dropped a little below, but the giant birds did a sharp turn and gained on them. Because they were living things, they could do such feats.

“What an ability to do sharp turns!”

Kuze could hear the pilot’s groaning voice. Continuing, then the co-pilot’s voice rang inside the cabin.

“An order from the commanding aircraft: Each aircraft, we will break formation due to the group on our tail. Do it discreetly so as to not provoke the enemy. That is all.”

Kuze gulped. Certainly, these are the people of this nation. Suddenly, they noticed a squad of helicopters and made it into a scramble.

In Japan, if an unknown, flying objects suddenly appeared, the same thing

would happen as the Aviation Self-Defense Force would set out. Thinking like this, we were the rude ones. The fault is with us, so we shouldn't do any aggressive enemy-like movements. The commanding decision from the white marine Sea Hawk is not wrong.

But, the subordinates feel uneasy.

"I-is it fine like this? At this rate we'll be shot down or something."

"W-we're surrounded, Platoon Leader Kuze!?"

Kuze used the radio across from him and screamed.

"Everyone listen! Calm down! We have not spotted any weapons on these people! We still don't know if they mean any hostility!"

Hearing the voice of the commander kept the subordinates from trembling. That time, what was important to the soldiers was something easy for Kuze: they needed some kind of instruction.

Soldiers without any instructions will start making movements on their own. That's why it's important to have a system for commanders to communicate with their soldiers.

"But, what are they really trying to do...?"

Kuze thought this as he gazed at the increasing number of giant birds with people riding them. What they've learned is that this is the same as the incident yesterday with the young girl riding a giant bird.

"Really, this is some parallel world, huh..."

Ichinose, surprised, made an expression of deep, mixed emotions and whispered to Kuze. Now that you speak of it, looking from the sky, the boats in the bay were all sailing ships with oarsmen and carrier ships.

On the streets were only carriages and carts for the giant birds and such, and there was nothing you could call a vehicle like an automobile that they could see. Their civilization level was, to a surprising degree, lower than their own world's.

It seems that they didn't have anything you could call a modern soldier. It was a natural thing that they wouldn't take or receive enemy or ally distinction radio

waves. Everyone was satisfied in thinking that we wandered into a different world.

“What is that...?”

One black giant bird moved in front of the helicopter squad, as if it knew its path and had moved to block it. Riding on its back was a fairly tall woman. She wore what looked to be a black coat and held a long lance. In one hand, as if holding a flat of the forces, she held it above her head in a way that’s reminiscent of a grim reaper.

In an instant, Kuze felt his eyes meet with the woman’s. Through intervals in her dark-green hair, he could catch glimpses of her beautiful face. In terms of years, she was about the same as Kuze’s age, maybe a little younger. The beautiful woman was not impeded. Her lips moved.

“Follow me.”

Is what he felt like she said. Though that’s what he felt, there’s no confirmation for her words. However, upon seeing her actions, the possibility of her saying that seemed strong, he felt. He then pressed the radio’s talk button.

“Commanding Aircraft, Can you hear me? This is Second Lieutenant Kuze of the Land Forces. Lieutenant Colonel Katou, I have a report.”

“Yes, yes, this is Katou. What is it, Kuze-san?”

The marine leader’s answering voice over the radio had a fair bit of superficial surprise in it. But, in this situation, the exchange didn’t sound like it disrupted him, it was reminiscent of a different kind of surprise. Kuze presently gave the report to the squad commander.

“I think that, maybe that woman riding on the giant black bird who is conducting the group wants to lead us somewhere.”

“Ah, I also vaguely felt the same feeling. My opinion is in agreement with yours, eh? Well then, let’s go follow her!”

“I-is that OK? If after we land, something were to happen...”

“That’s why you guys are here, right? I’ve said it since long ago, ‘you can’t catch the baby tiger if you don’t go into the tiger’s den (TL Note: This is an idiom

which means “Nothing ventured, nothing gained”)’. You’ll be my support. Over.”

Even after he cut the communication, Kuze still firmly pressed the talk button. Kuze couldn’t believe that the joint marine and land forces that came across these giant birds and the like are led by THAT marine force leader.

Was he just your usual oaf, or was he a heroic man of courage? It was either one of these or the other.

Following the commander’s lead, the helicopter squad began to follow that giant bird the girl was riding on and started to descend. Under their eyes, they could see the humongous castle.

Part 11

The guards who gathered in the courtyard were first surprised by the strange objects and then recoiled due to the strong wind caused by them. When an Argentavis comes down, it's not as strong as this gust of wind.

"I-it's a monster?!"

"Co-commanding officer?! I-is this connected with the pirate story?!"

"WH-what is that?! Birds...no, bugs?"

Unknown beings are coming. That was all the information they were given. They were ordered not to attack if they didn't show any hostility, but to them that gust alone can be a sign of hostility.

There were four mysterious bugs, no, they aren't even sure if these things are living or not, these things disrupted the beautiful flowers that are in bloom inside the courtyard by the roars it emitted raining down upon them.

The fierce winds immediately settled. The guards exchanged glances. Her Majesty the Queen had said to bring them to her, so there was no reason to send them away. A perplexing silence came upon them. And, the Flying Light Armor Unit's Leader made her subordinates come down with her.

Originally, they were supposed to go to the hanger between the castle and the ocean, but in such a rush it would be nearly impossible, so she dropped here. The giant birds flying over the 10 equestrians caused the guards to shriek again.

"Their movements are?"

The person who went down gallantly to the ground was the dark-green haired female officer carrying a lance in the black overcoat.

The unit leader of the guards understood that the woman was Karuda, and criticized her crazy landing with their gaze and then gave an honest report.

"There have been no movements. Still, we don't know anything about these creatures."

The unit leader of the guards was talking when suddenly 'ga-ra', the stomach of the strange creature opened up. And the soldiers were running high with tension. (Editor: ga-ra is a SFX for opening the slide door)

"From the belly of the beast, people?"

A member of the guards said dumbfounded.

"...Somehow, it seems they were riding in it."

Karuda noticed that people were riding inside that thing while she was flying in the sky. And, she also noticed that they were wearing strange clothes they had never seen before.

"That's the man I saw in the sky, eh..."

Karuda held a lance in her hand. The one who came out was a similarly strange young man wearing spotted patterned clothes. Next, from the white colored body of the strange creature came out the figure of a man wearing glasses and white clothes. At one glance, they couldn't see anything that would be a weapon they'd be holding. There were more people riding inside the things, but they just looked worried for the two who stepped out.

"Do these people have no intention to fight?"

Karuda thought and felt this. But, she had to hastily shake off such thoughts as "negligence on the battlefield will take your life."

"Stop!"

Karuda restrained the two who were casually walking towards them.

"Eh? Just now, Japanese?"

"Please don't be too alerted; we harbor no animosity."

From the two, the one in the white clothes and was wearing glasses was the one who answered. They were pretty fluent at the language of the Four Land and Seas and they didn't have an accent.

"Tell us your names."

The two exchanged glances at Karuda's sharp voice and presently bowed their heads.

“Member of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force, Lieutenant Colonel Katou”

“Similarly, belonging to the Ground Self-Defense Force, I am Second Lieutenant Kuze”

The two said this and ambiguously lifted their empty hands up into the air and moved with super-serious faces.

“Japan? Maritime Self-Defense?”

She inclined, her head in doubt at the words she’s never heard before. She had also never heard of the country called Japan. In addition, there was no race around here with such black hair and light-brown pupils. Rather, there was no one around here who could control those strange objects like that. This too-fantastical existence that even kids couldn’t dream of caused some doubt in the soldiers.

“Karuda-sama! These guys are definitely the empire’s dark magic corps!”

“Don’t be too gullible!”

Karuda also wanted to agree with her subordinates. The Filborg Inheritance Empire gathered so much territory that from all this territory and tribes, they chose the best assassins and special ability users and formed what is called the dark magic corps—that special squad exists. (TL note: The dark magic corps is actually a combination of the words assassin and magic. The literal definition is dark magic, however, and that’s what I have decided to call it rather than come up with my own combination name.)

They have gathered forbidden magic arts and long sealed-away magic weapons. None of the like were around here. But, although though Karuda decided this, something felt wrong.

Though it was hard to tell, their ambiance didn’t feel very much like the empire’s inhumane soldiers. One was a man wearing glasses who seemed harmless to man and beast alike. The other was a man who, although young, seemed dependable. The two seemed well-disciplined, and their way of speaking and movements were a characteristic of a body in a respectable military.

But, something didn't add up. Yes, they don't have any desire to kill, but they've got no feeling of the same tension like our side does. Probably, if I were to challenge them with my lance, their chests would be impaled within a few seconds. They have that level of trust to not be worried in spite of this.

"I don't know if you are forces with that empire or what, but we have no such organization as you've mentioned and we have no relation to any such thing."

The two made them grow impatient and so a desperate explanation emerged from Karuda.

"...So, for what reason have you come to this country?"

She was like the place's commander and was the one who asked the questions. The two exchanged glances. It was suspicious, but it wasn't to make sure their story adds up; they truly looked puzzled by her words.

"That would become a long story. Really, how should we explain..."

The one wearing glasses, he said his name was Katou, gave a strained laugh. The young man wearing the green and light brown patterned clothes made a surprised face.

Certainly, these guys are suspicious. At the very least, they are not worthy to bring in front of Her Majesty...

"Hm, well this has deepened my interest. Now then, I'll listen from the middle of this conversation."

Suddenly, a voice came from behind. Karuda was so surprised, she turned around from facing the 2 men.

"Y-your Majesty!?"

Karuda's voice turned inside out. The normally calm girl was surprised more than she could have imagine. The guards too quickly turned around and fell prostrate. Suddenly, everyone acted like something had happened, so the 2 men who didn't know what was going on were confused and could only look around. Queen Hamieea, surrounded by maids and the near-by guards, chuckled, and laughed with a deep meaning. She slipped past Karuda's side and stood in front of the two men.

“I am Hamieea. I am this nation’s monarch.”

“Monarch?”

The two looked down at the tiny Hamieea in shock, and looked at each other. This small girl, a monarch? That was the face they were making.

“B-by monarch, you mean, like, the Queen of this land?”

“Yes, it would appear that way.”

“Ah, we didn’t salute her...no, when meeting the foreign head of state-class leaders, we’re supposed to present our arms, yeah...Ah! I didn’t bring my gun...”

Hamieea squinted her eyes at these two. And, she made a big laugh as she walked in Karuda’s direction.

“Somehow, Karuda, we can be sure only on the fact that they do not belong to the empire’s forces, no?”

“Yes, that may be so...”

Karuda didn’t propose otherwise.

“Anyway, though I said to bring them in front of me defenseless, they have no hostile intent. At least, they are not enemies.”

Katou agreed with the little girl’s words.

“Eh, with this it’s confirmed. Your Highness the Queen, thank you for the honor of meeting with us.”

“Then, this was a fast conversation.”

With a harmless laugh, Hamieea clapped her hands.

“Everyone, they are guests. Make preparations for a feast.”

The two understood what that meant and walk forward with rapid strides. But, they moved too quickly, and they felt a bad premonition.

Part 12

While the banquet was being prepared, Kuze held a short meeting in front of the landed aircrafts. Gathered there were each of the platoon's commanding non-commissioned officer. Kuze had split his group of 31 members into 3 different squads. This time, the divisions were emphasized.

"Squads 1 and 2 will act as my and Lieutenant Colonel's escort. Squad 3 will remain here to ensure the safety of the LZ." (Editor: Means Landing Zone)

Each of the squad's leader bowed their heads nervously. Kuze is bringing squad one and squad two's group of 20 people. The remaining 11 people were to safeguard the LZ.

"Squad leaders, any questions?"

"None."

Normally, in the Self-Defense Force, they'd use a more conventional, formal responses, but the nervousness this time made it different.

"Something's suspicious. Lieutenant Colonel Katou was talking about this, but they're always carrying weapons. If they do anything suspicious, immediately contact us. You can rely on the pilot to never leave the helicopter. If escape is made impossible, it'll be bad. We'll keep the radio line open."

"Understood."

Kuze as a leader of the platoon himself, was worried about leaving their lifeline: the LZ. But, to Commander Katou, the escort was the top priority. So, rather than the danger to himself, he was worried about going into the castle.

"We're leaving the security of the LZ to you, Sergeant Yaegashi."

"Understood. Second Lieutenant Kuze, as well, be careful!"

Kuze patted the shoulder of the squad leader of the 3rd squad, Sergeant Yaegashi. Yaegashi truly was worried about Kuze.

On account of his small stature, he looked younger than his real age, which is a little over 30. He had the face of a teenager. Maybe it's because he was

always making a childlike, innocent face, but many members of his squad adored him.

But, this appearance didn't fit him. He held the strongest ranger emblem in all the Self-Defense Force. Among many novice-level officer leaders, he was the one who aided in instating Kuze to his high post.

So, Kuze holds a lot of faith in him. Yaegashi also holds a lot of faith in Kuze, who is not lacking in effort. He himself probably would not have been able to apply for being a ranger if he were not a hard-worker.

"Kuze-kun, shall we get going? It won't be good to keep them waiting."

Katou raised his optimistic voice from behind. Conversely, Kuze felt a bit of admiration for his lack of worry.

"Ah, yes. Then, Squad 1 and Squad 2, assemble. Oh, Ichinose, you stay here. You don't have to be in my escort."

The sniper Ichinose, who was hidden by his bush hat and did the preparations, stood puzzled.

"Huh? But, fundamentally, if I'm not by the commander's side..."

The land force's sharp shooter is supposed to protect the commander, so Ichinose thought that he should be near the commander this time as well. But, a surprised expression emerged on Kuze's face.

"What do you think they will do if we bring a sniper gun inside? It's useless in there. Instead, stay here."

"Ah, now that you say it, I can see what you mean."

To say his real intention, even if they get retrained inside the castle, so long as the helicopters are close, the possibility of escape was there.

He wanted the youngsters like Ichinose to stay there out of something like a parent's love for their child. After the preparations were done, Kuze and Katou brought their escort squad with them and headed inside the castle.

"Still, this is an amazing castle..."

Kuze raised his work hat slightly and looked up at the towering minarets.

Instead of a castle in the West, they felt it overflowed with the exotic design of, say, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Turkey.

As they walked through the marble hall, they felt the vibrations of someone playing an instrument loudly. They weren't sorry they were wearing boots.

The features and accessories were very beautiful and looked very expensive. There was a great majestic feeling from just being there a while. No doubt it was compounded with being in the military so long.

"Is this your first time in a castle?"

Karuda asked the two from behind.

"Eh? Yes. This is the first time."

"...I see."

Karuda mumbled this, and that was the last they heard.

"If this is their first attendance at a castle, then their social stature must be pretty low."

She thought that they were becoming increasingly shady people. Originally, she felt there was no way they could be brought in front of Her Majesty, let alone have a feast prepared for them. However, she could see that Her Majesty was thinking something. So, I have to follow them.

"Actually, now that you say castle, would going to the Kumamoto Castle (TL note: 1 of 3 premier castles in Japan) during a field trip count?"

"Hmm, we also went to the Nagoya Castle (TL note: Nagoya was an important castle town)."

As usual, she didn't understand the conversation. They were definitely not enemies, though, maybe.

But, not knowing their personality, what will happen if they become our allies? They don't look very strong.

I see, those queer things that can fly through the sky they rode in and that iron ship that Practice Officer Rarona saw might be of some value. But I didn't think it would be of use in battle. Hiring traveling mercenaries still doesn't seem

the right way to go.

“Beyond this is the throne room. I trust you won’t do anything careless.”

Karuda coolly looked at the two and their escort which carried oddly-shaped iron canes.

“We don’t clearly understand this world’s etiquette, so whenever we do something taboo, we’d appreciate it if you would tell us.”

“I will be in the same area as you, so I will be using my discretion.”

There was no better answer than this for a noble like Karuda. Honestly, we should quickly expel these guys out of here, train them as subordinates, and keep them for battle if the empire gains ground. It’s not the time to be holding a feast.

“...Doesn’t seem like a bad person, eh?”

“But she feels a little scary!”

“Ah, that’s there too! It feels like she definitely would string a man along.”

Karuda pretended not to hear...since it hurt her feelings a bit.

The girl who gave her name as Karuda stopped in front of a giant gates. This is probably the throne room.

“These are the guests. Open the Gates!”

“Your pleasure.”

The strong men who had been waiting to the side of the Gates answered. Surrounding them were women, whose faces were hidden by veils, lined up with swords at their waist.

“Those girls are probably personal guards.”

To what Katou had whispered into his ear, Kuze shook his head. Since she is a queen, it’s probably good that she’s surrounded with similarly female guards. Kuze felt stinging glances from the women.

If we were to take out a gun, the level is totally different from theirs. That’s because they carry their weapons if there’s something they would understand as an intent to harm the queen would come. Probably, if any little movement

were to happen, the girls would start a volley of shots this way.

Only in this close proximity is a gun a calming weapon, that which is normally used to mangle your enemy from the outside in. Kuze felt in his heart that they were suspicious.

“Gates open!”

It made a loud noise and many men had opened the gate. If there were a war, this gate would be the last line of defense. Kuze and company passed under the giant gate.

“You’ve come. What, you do not know of our proper etiquette? Do not fret, come, and relax.”

The atmosphere was of gourmet food aligned in a nice, narrow space.

“W-well, this is...”

“I-is this OK, legally? To accept such a reception...”

The two’s welcome had them become lost in wonderment. They sat at the low table that had been prepared. Their weapons behind them and being placed in what would be called a blind spot. Kuze gave a small order via radio.

“They held nothing back. Ah, we will let them bring the same back to you guys waiting in the courtyard too, so don’t think it’s just for us.”

“Thank you very much.”

To Katou, who was in agreement, Kuze asked,

“Is that fine, Lieutenant Colonel Katou?”

“We can’t throw away the possibility of their being poison, but there’s no reason to go all this way to just kill us. There could be sleeping pills to put us to sleep and take us as hostages, but again, I can’t think of why they’d go so far just to do that.”

“Do you think that they really just took us as guests?”

“I dunno. We’ve still got to verify that. Oh?”

A young girl came and delivered a cup of wine. With skilled movements, she poured them some alcoholic beverages. She was a maid that moves throughout

the castle. Everyone's, so young. There was also a girl who would be fair to describe as very young. Kuze smiled at the girl near him.

"Ah, thank you."

"Eh? Y-yes. Graciously, thank you."

She had skin like white porcelain and beady eyes and was in her mid-teens (In Japan, about 13-16, maybe a bit younger or older). She had thin blonde hair with pink highlights that ran down to her shoulders. She wore cool clothes which were somewhat bare in some places, and was very refined. They seemed like a belly dancer's clothes, but she wore them like a gentlewoman. She's a cute girl, thought Kuze.

Up until now it had been pretty tense, but her presence made the atmosphere a little more relaxed. She herself was confused at not being more formal in the throne room. When she looked at Kuze's face, she felt a little embarrassed. He was unaware, but he was a rare sight among the leaders of the army as you could say he had the appearance of an Adonis. She was also embarrassed because he started talking so close to her.

"Second Lieutenant Kuze"

Katou had took a sidelong glance at Kuze.

"Yes?"

"...Nothing."

Katou quickly faced the other way and the light reflected off his glasses as he mumbled, "This is why handsome men are..." with resentment.

Anyhow, it seemed he was jealous of the good mood with that girl. This man in this condition in these circumstances might make you think a screw might get loose, but he respected Kuze in an odd way.

"If possible, could you make the next drink be non-alcoholic, like water or juice?"

"I understand and will do."

To Kuze's request, the young girl politely lifted her head and comfortably answered. The first cup couldn't be helped, but during a mission there was no

way he could keep drinking and get drunk.

On Kuze's right, as he looked at the hand guard related to dust management, he confirmed with a side glance that on the floor next to his subordinate's two legs was a 5.56 mm rifle. As a commander, he could not let them know his fear of them finding out they were carrying live ammunition.

"Now's about time to spread out the alcohol,"

Hamieea also got up holding her own cup.

"Guests: Before we celebrate your visit, may I ask something?"

"If we can answer. What is the question, Your Majesty?"

Katou replied.

"You guys said you came from a nation we've not heard of, but what exactly is that country like? To get straight to the point."

An expression of wanting to test something came over Hamieea's face.

"You people, exactly where have you come from?"

The place went into a complete, dead silence. The queen's voice went into a solemn place of nonexistence. Because it was her, there was no meaning to give the question the slip. Katou made a face as if he was in trouble because of what came up, and stood similarly as the queen did and made an earnest expression to answer.

"From a world different than this one; we're from another world."

Part 13

In the courtyard, a butterfly of a rare color danced and a small bird chirped. A flower resembling a hibiscus was in full bloom.

If the engine of the helicopter stopped, the only loud noise you would hear was the water fountain: it was a peaceful, serene place.

Five of the Argentavis of the Flying Light Armor Unit were resting their wings, but the only giant birds there were used in practice for military use, so it's not like they ran over a flowerbed or anything.

All around, there were also birds sleeping quietly. Amongst the flowers, the Black Hawk and Argentavis stood still there together; it was a scene you felt like smiling at somewhere inside.

"Heh, looking at it like this, it looks kinda cute."

Ichinose went to scout around the perimeter of the helicopter when he casually got close to a giant bird. He pulled out his smart phone from his pocket. He started up the camera and tried to take a picture of the giant living creature. But...

"What have you done to my partner?"

At the sudden voice, he jumped up a bit in surprise.

"Oh ah ah ah, so-sorry, I just wanted to take a picture."

Ichinose faltered at the threatening attitude of the person who appeared in front of his eyes. She had red hair that was the color of a burning fire and her blue pupils that were the color of the ocean that she used to keep an eye on Ichinose.

Due to her intensity and her strong-willed face, Ichinose thought for a moment that she might be a boy, but by her voice he realized that she was a girl. By her small chest, Ichinose could guess that she was in her teens. She's a pretty boyish girl, Ichinose whispered in his heart.

On the girl's waist was a sword. Now it looked like she was about to draw it

out. It was different from just being dressed in a costume; she gave off an intimidating air of knowing what she was doing with the blade, it's the "real deal".

"Picture? What is that? Wait, are you trying to cast some strange curse?!"

He was becoming an increasingly suspicious guy, and she kept an eye on him with her hand at her waist. And—

"Kyuua!"

"Wha!?"

The bush hat covering Ichinose's head was taken from him. He confusedly turned his head to see that the sleeping giant bird now have his bush hat in its beak. Ichinose got desperate and went to take back his bush hat. But, getting up, the bird's head is so high that a human can't reach it.

"Tail!? It's not good to take that guy's stuff!"

"He—! If I lose official goods I'll have to write an apology so please cut me some slack, seriously!"

"Kyuua!"

When he asked to be cut of some slack and made some motions, the giant bird returned his bush hat to him.

"Wa-was that some sort of a prank..."

Ichinose wondered if the giant bird was smarter than he thought. But, he was dejected at the bush hat he picked up being full of drool.

"To suffer like this..."

In the direction he was drawn to, the young girl laughed.

"Ahahaha!"

"W-what?"

Ichinose tried to shake off the drool from his punishment.

"Oh, no, it's just that you're a rare person for my hard-to-please partner to take a liking to you."

The red-haired girl said marveling in a fun way.

“This is him taking a liking to me?”

“Yeah, very much so.”

The girl patted the head of the giant bird that was getting closer to him. Ichinose felt that there was a special bond between them. This was a parallel world. Despite this, he thought that this was a place full with compassionate people. He saw this scene, when suddenly the girl raised her head.

“Over there is a pretty gushing water way where the water is drawn off. You can wash it off there.”

“Eh? Uh, thank you.”

“But you shouldn’t go loitering around by yourself, so I’ll guide you. Follow me.”

The earlier threatening attitude seemed to have been dropped somewhere and she would guide Ichinose to clean his dirty hat.

“What are you doing, Ichinose; it’s bad to cause trouble for other people.”

A tone like that of one scolding a child came over the radio.

“Sorry...”

He gave a report to squad leader Sergeant Yaegashi and saw him wave his hand on the other side. It seemed as though he saw the whole thing. He warned Ichinose to hurry and return, and Ichinose separated from the party. The story wasn’t so simple, so he was given permission to go.

“I never gave you my name. I am Rarona, Practice Officer of the Flying Light Armor Unit. Welcome to the Mariisua Southern Sea United Kingdom.”

The girl, walking ahead, said this without looking back. Ichinose also didn’t say anything then, but he opened his mouth.

“I-I am Ichinose. N-nice to meet you.”

In this place, it didn’t naturally come to him to give his name as a soldier. After he finished the Self-Defense classes and took a break, whether it be meeting his peers at a higher education or in class, no one had much interest in

him saying his name.

This conversation could get him out of this rut, so to speak. So, after Ichinose told her his name, he acted tactfully. When the young girl told her name to the soldier, he initially acted without much thought. Rarona turned around, made a curious face, and peered into Ichinose. She did this without the desperate worry Ichinose has.

“So what’s your occupation?”

Again she asked, so Ichinose was surely going to give his name appropriately.

“Hm? Oh, I am a private of the Ground Self-Defense Force. This means I’m in the infantry, as a sniper.”

Rarona made a dubious face at these words that she was not used to.

“A private of the Ground Self-Defense Force?”

“A private, it means that I’m the second class of non-commissioned military rank. I’m an underling essentially.”

Upon hearing this, Rarona was amazed.

“What?”

She innocently laughed.

“So the same as me.”

“Is that so?”

“Yup. By the way, what is an ‘infantry’? A special branch of the military?”

“It’s just an ordinary foot soldier.”

Rarona stared blankly and tilted her head.

“If you’re foot soldiers, why not just call yourselves foot soldiers?”

She asked in all seriousness. The response was a perplexing answer.

“Th-that’s because of, well, the situation of the Self-Defense Force...”

In the olden days of Japan, the Self Defense Force didn’t use names with such associations. Foot soldiers are infantry, the artillery are support soldiers, the military engineers are engineers, and so on; the names changed to support less

of an image of warriors and the military.

(TL note: This doesn't carry over easily into English. These are just different Japanese names but the English names of the Japanese positions aren't so varied)

It is extremely difficult to explain to someone who knows nothing of the Self-Defense Force like Rarona. Ichinose was worried about how he could explain this to her. And then——

“Ah, it's like that!”

Rarona clapped her hands together.

“In our nation, the name of the forces are named in association to courageous heroes and sacred beasts and can be named different things. This ‘infantry’ is some sort of special person or thing, right? Sorry, please don't think badly of me for interrupting.”

Rarona seemed to be looking a tad too deep into it, and didn't seem earnest in her apology. It wasn't anything special, you could enter into it young and early, and so it was the infantry.

(TL note: this doesn't carry over well. It uses the word infantry in Japanese, 普通科 and uses the word making it up, which means normal, 普通 It doesn't make sense in English, but the line literally reads, “It's normal, so it's called the infantry.”)

But Ichinose figured that feebly trying to correct her would be uncouth, and so He decided to say nothing further on the subject. And then...

“She's pretty straightforward amongst all of the confusion. That's a first...” For better or for worse, Rarona was definitely genuine, he thought.

it's here.”

Rarona called his attention. While, they were chatting, they made it to the waterway behind some shrubbery. While Ichinose continued the conversation, you could hear the splash of water as he cleaned off his hat.

While they continued talking, Rarona suddenly raised her voice in disarray.

“A parallel world? You guys came from a parallel world?!”

“Yeah, it seems that way. Now, Platoon Leader Kuze and company went to speak with your queen, but I wonder what will come of it?”

“A parallel world...if not, that ship made of iron shouldn't exist, eh...”

Rarona had heard that the iron ship can't be from this world, but she couldn't believe that as she was sure she had seen it, but maybe this explanation could satisfy her. She saw the fleet of ships with her own eyes and felt the strange, overwhelming presence there directly.

“It's fine like that. This country is hot, so it'll dry off soon.”

Ichinose wrapped his still wet bush hat.

“That's terrible. You've come to such a remote country...”

“No, if something's terrible, it would be for you, no?”

“What is?”

Rarona looked puzzled.

“I mean, isn't it unbelievable that even kids like you are in the military?”

“Why is it so unbelievable to join the fight to protect your country?”

“No, it's just, normally, people your age would be going to school and what-not.”

“School and the like is just for nobles and the rich, though?”

Ichinose was surprised. In this world, young soldiers like her would appear to be natural...

“In addition, I've got comrades in the military, and my partner. We get 3 meals a day. In addition, we get the honor of protecting our nation. To your average mountain person like me, it's a place that offers more than what we could ask for.”

Rarona said this as if she were having fun. Ichinose felt as though he'd just seen something he couldn't believe.

“We-well, is that so? Well, if you yourself say its fine then its fine, I guess?”

Not satisfied, Ichinose moved to go back to the helicopter.

“That aside, being able to ride giant birds and fly through the sky is incredible.”

While Ichinose saw the Argentavis resting their wings, she said this. Incredible, she said and she was happy as her boyish face made a laugh that was excessively like that of a young boy.

“Hehe, right? I don’t ride any other than the one I’ve already chosen.”

“Hm, so, is that one flying over there your comrade as well?”

Ichinose suddenly asked about something he saw flying on the other side of the ocean.

“Eh?”

Rarona stared in the direction he pointed in. She had no idea what it was. At this time, there shouldn’t be any Argentavis on the other side of the ocean on business. There also shouldn’t be any colleagues doing recon right now. Because, on the other side of the ocean is...

“Tha...t....can’t...be...”

Rarona was frozen in fear and her throat became dry.

“What’s wrong? Are they people you don’t know?”

He thought that these must not be normal circumstances for her. Ichinose carries his essential sharp-shooter items inside his duffel bag on his waist, so he took out his observational binoculars. He looked through the lenses.

“Eh?”

He noticed a terrifying number of things flying on the other side of the ocean. It wasn’t ten, nor was in twenty. It was more. And, they were...

Rarona, who was raised in the mountains where the people have much better eyesight than the average person, was able to verify it faster than the binocular-using Ichinose. She noticed the living things.

“It’s the Empire’s forces!”

She said this as if to wring out the terror that strung on her face.

Chapter 3: Shooting

Part 1

Just as the feast was about to start, that happened. There was a heavy noise as though the castle shook. Hamieea twitched her clean-cut eyebrows.

“What is this?”

She asked her subordinates in a voice that was so deep it is hard to imagine it came out of a little girl. The ministers just looked at each other, no one holding a proper answer. And, finally, that answer came amid the confusion. The palace guards rushed into the throne room, out of breath.

“R-report! The Empire’s forces from their flying unit are coming to the Imperial Capital in large numbers! Presently, the defensive unit has made a call for the forces, but due to the sudden nature of their attack, our defense preparations are...”

Not just Hamieea, but everyone in the throne room opened their eyes in shock.

“Impossible?! It’s too soon!”

Spurning the last circular, not even two days had passed since accepting their declaration of war. Speaking of the Empire’s forces, the distance between here and the Empire is too far for their forces to get here so quickly. From the closest port, even if the winds were greatly in their favor, it would take at least four days to travel this distance.

“C-could it be a landing operations?”

(Editor: A landing operation is a military action during which a landing force, usually utilizing landing craft, is transferred to land with the purpose of power projection ashore. With the proliferation of aircraft, a landing may refer to amphibious forces, airborne forces, or a combination of both.-Wiki)

“No, this speed must be due to them flying through the sky!”

“This sounds ridiculous, but you don’t think they’re attacking us with their

Argentavis squad, do you? If so, then in a defensive battle, at least, victory is...”

There was another vibration in the noisy throne room. This time, it was close.

“No, somehow it seems it’s not like that. This noise isn’t normal.”

Hamieea got down from her throne and ran to the terrace.

“Your Majesty?! It’s dangerous!”

When the aides following her stepped onto the terrace, at that very moment, they were at a loss for words at the spectacle they just saw.

“Th-that is...no way!?”

Karuda saw its shadow flying in the sky, and in fear grabbed her heart.

“No way....against such a small nation, they’d bring in their dragon squad?!”

Kuze’s group—the Self-Defense Force, went out in groups to the terrace as well, since they didn’t know what was going on. And, what they saw in the sky shocked them. In the sky, what was flying was not aircraft or giant birds, but a different creature was flying about. Their bodies were black and white and looked like giant dinosaurs.

“This can’t be, man...”

Kuze was dumbfounded to lay eyes on such a creature’s form. It looked to be like that “dragon” from old myths and legends. That fictitious, imaginary creature, the dragon, was flying before his very eyes right now. No, that was not all.

Kyaaaaaaaaa!

The dragon was being repelled by the bows and arrows, and so it made a sharp turn and drew closer as it opened its jaw and spat out crimson flames.

“That’s impossible!? For there to be a living creature that can spit out a fire is...”

But, right there it certainly was. The stench of the burned hole reached the terrace. The sensation was something unknown even to their dreams. The SDF shuddered at such a marvel of the living creature spitting out fire. They could see a section of the palace walls up in flames, while the burnt soldiers screamed

and rolled down. Karuda groaned.

“Fire Breath! Is that a black dragon!?”

Proven true, dragons of a vast number of ominous black bodies could be seen flying at the sky of the castle. And, one group of the forces approached closer and spat out flames coming in for the kill. The arrows sent out by the soldiers unfortunately just bounced back off of the hard scales of the dragon.

The black dragon repeatedly attacked the positions of the archers. With its sharp claws, it could go through armor, and those who would run that way and they would end up covered in flames courtesy of its fire breath. The power of humans was made to naught in front of a dragon.

“Ugh!”

To such gruesomeness, Kuze, without thinking, averted his eyes. In front of his eyes, people would die.

“This much, so quickly?!”

He couldn’t believe it. At the same time, he understood that this was an unbelievable situation the country had fallen into. Some time ago, Hamieea’s group had said something about “The Empire’s forces.” A different nation was attacking this nation with something beyond their imagination. Yes, and his group was left right in the thick of it.

Kuze and Katou looked at each other. As mutual commanders, they nodded their heads. Without exchanging words, they were in agreement in their views. Kuze exchanged looks at the other members of their squad. In response to Kuze’s facial expression, his subordinates carried their equipment in their hands. This was preparation for a retreat.

“We will return to the Fleet Vessels. Under these circumstances, they may think of us as cold-hearted, but never mind that...”

To Katou’s voice, the ministers made a sullen face. Yup, it would appear that they thought of them as cold-hearted. But, the SDF forces couldn’t do anything about that.

No, to be more precise, they couldn’t do anything about it. They are the Self-

Defense Force. It was an inviolable rule that they had an Exclusively Defense Security System, and it was an organization that had forbidden preemptive strikes. Even if this country was attacked, so long as they were not attacked, they couldn't do anything. Giving a disapproving look to the ministers, Hamieea flapped her fan and made a cool face.

"What, are you crying about the non-involvement of people from a different world? I wouldn't stop them."

"We apologize. Please, have a safe trip."

Staying any longer would be dangerous, so Kuze gathered his subordinates and ran off. He ran into the throne room and set off running to the courtyard. Upon seeing off his back running away, Karuda asked Hamieea.

"Is this fine? Your Majesty?"

Hamieea made a delicate laugh.

"With dragons fluttering about in the sky, they can't stay safe either way. Not by looking at their contraption."

Kuze's group ran through the marble corridor with all their might. Katou made a face like he was going to die and grumbled.

"Ah! This is harsh compared to living in an entirely air-conditioned transport vessel..."

Katou wasn't wearing the extra camo battle uniforms like Kuze's group of the land forces, but the pure white summer uniform of the marine force. All of his belongings, like his camera and laptop, were all in his bag.

"The land force has no such comfort! If you don't want to die, please run!"

Kuze said this to Katou and, while running with a gun in one hand, got his radio to scream into it.

"Please speak to the pilot that we are returning and have him prepare for take off ASAP and standby!"

"U-understood!"

"Get permission to load the live ammunition for an emergency situation! But,

with the limitation of ensuring the safety of the targets while protecting and defending our own!”

Kuze’s voice was strained. It was a necessary order, and the situation could very well become a big problem.

“Second Lieutenant Kuze, Second Lieutenant Kuze! Wa-wait a second...”

As Katou had said, his body wasn’t prepared for this type of situation, and he lagged behind the land force’s group led by Kuze. Kuze raised his voice.

“Group 1! Group 2! Stop! Be cautious of the whole perimeter.”

The 21 members took out their guns and prepared a battle formation by making a 360-degree circle with no gaps. Katou used his hand to stop Kuze, who was hurrying ahead with a nervous expression. This merely slowed him down, so there was no stop to the yelling.

“It’s good to be cautious! The Empire’s forces are not just dragons!”

“Wh-what do you mean by this?”

Kuze asked this to Katou as though it were a simple question.

“We saw soldiers lowering to the castle on giant black birds. Most likely, they are infiltrating right now. It wouldn’t be strange for them to try and kill us, so it’s not good to carelessly run around, don’t you think?”

To Katou’s decision, Kuze groaned as though to answer that Katou was right.

“Lieutenant Colonel Katou,”

“Hmm?”

“Excuse me, but let’s prepare for an off-chance possibility. For self-defense, please wait.”

Kuze took his 9mm pistol used for self-defense from his waist and presented it to Katou. Of all on the land, earth, or sky, the officers certainly can teach you how to use this weapon. Katou should certainly make use of it.

Katou was a member of the SDF. He was taught the way to carry this weapon meant to protect his body by Kuze. However, Katou shook his head.

“You should hold it, not me. In the marine force, we shoot guns like that and

stuff once every few years. But thanks for your good intention, Second Lieutenant Kuze.”

“But...”

With Katou deriding himself, Kuze turned to look at him with worried eyes.

“Kyaaaa!?”

A shriek resounded from somewhere. The force members stiffened up. Kuze got into a low position with his type 89 rifle. He put his finger on the safety with an attitude of adaptation.

“...That was the scream of a girl.”

To Katou’s words, Kuze’s forehead became wet with sweat as he nodded in agreement. And, he considered a full operation. What do do? What is the right decision? Do we rescue the source of that scream? To save her, what do we do if we were put in danger? Do I order underlings to use threatening force?

“Second Lieutenant Kuze, what are the rules of engagement in this situation...?”

He asked holding a worried expression at the concept of battle, despite being a young first-class leader. Kuze’s group was composed of young people. The average age in the group was the first half of the twenties. They were youthful and passionate. But to put it negatively, if they were pushed into a corner, even then, they would be reluctant to shoot the assailant.

“On an enemy, exactly what do we aim for?”

As the leader of the land forces, Kuze had felt a worried hesitation, but it was so he could make a decision-based in clear standards. Kuze shook his head. That was to give a feeling of admonishment.

“The Rules of Engagement limit us to legitimate self-defense only. In any other situation, listen to my orders.”

It was a model answer. However, at the same time, it was so vague that you could hear him evading the answer.

“U-understood.”

Many of the subordinates were dissatisfied. In such a tight space, it was certain that they couldn't shoot so that no one would be made a sacrifice. Up until today, the SDF has the same policy of not spilling blood in these types of situations.

To Kuze who is merely the leader in this place, it wasn't a problem he could think about and answer differently from the policy. To use a weapon, there were bare requirements; it is written that there must be a decision by the commander in the area where there is reasonable cause to use the weapon in that range.

Ultimately, it was Kuze's misfortune to bear all the responsibility as the area's commander, and it is improper to say the government's liability and the ministers of defense higher-ups. Kuze gnashed his teeth.

He was standing at a crucial point, thinking to make the best decision and take responsibility for that path.

"...Second Lieutenant Kuze,"

Katou suddenly puts his hand on Kuze's shoulder.

"There's nothing to worry about. There's no direct right to command here; the one to take responsibility for this group is me."

Kuze stared at the head of the marine group. He had an expression, as though he was aloof from the world with nothing bringing him back.

"Your decision, I'll take responsibility for it. Whether we shoot, we don't shoot, and I'll take full responsibility. So, make your choice without hesitation."

"Lieutenant Colonel Katou..."

Kuze suddenly felt as though his shoulders got lighter. Someone was there who understood his anguish, and he didn't think he could be this relieved.

"Thank you very much..."

"Let your gratitude be living and returning to where we're from."

Kuze understood that this was no joke or mere decision by rank. Just knowing this, it was reassuring.

“Everyone, advance to contact!”

“Roger...!”

The underlings were ready in position with their guns in this tense situation and started to advance slowly.

“You could hear that yell from here and there...”

“The inside of this castle has a terrible situation on their hands.”

It was when Kuze answered. From their side, out of a door, the figures of many people would seem to fly out. Without thinking, Kuze and his underlings pointed their gunpoint to the figures. But, they stopped immediately. They were real figures of people, but they were children. They thought it was good that the figures were just trainees to protect the town areas forging their dynamic vision.

The number was three people, who were so frightened that their faces were pathetically pale. The three people were all young, but among them was a girl who held seniority, and Kuze noticed she was the same maid who had helped them earlier with the wine glasses. From the other side, the girl may have remembered them, as she made a face of being taken aback.

“Ah, you are...!”

“You guys, are you OK?”

Kuze lowered his gun and smiled. Perhaps it was because of his gentle smile, but the two kids nestled against the maid with watery eyes. The two clung onto her. Probably, she came all the way here protecting them.

“Everyone...everyone was killed...”

They died, no, they were all killed, to these words Kuze took in a breath. Well, he can't ask why they survived and are alive.

“You guys come with us. We can make room on the helicopter so you can come with us and escape...”

Kuze said this and went to extend his hand in an instant. Then, an obtuse sound entered Kuze's ears.

“Eh?”

The young girl’s balance was ruined, and she fell to the floor. On her back were ominous arrow feathers.

“Wha-?!”

Katou raised his voice in surprise. Kuze couldn’t make sense of what was happening in his head.

“You got one.”

“Nice skill as always, Ruido.”

It was the voice of someone’s subordinate, but not one that was from Kuze’s, but a low, male voice from the other side of the corridor. The sound of armor reached all the way over here. They were black figures. Not your normal black: They were jet black.

“Big Sis!?” (TL note: it is used as an endearing term, doesn’t need to mean an actual familial connection)

The kids screamed. To those two, it was as though a group of ten grim reapers dressed in black was around them getting closer. Having returned to his senses, Kuze screamed in an inside-out voice.

“Stop!”

By the warning, the men stopped. However, there was no reason to falter. They didn’t stop to comply with the warning, but so that they could evaluate the group. From the group in full black, you could feel a painful amount of bloodthirst. They all had hanging on their waists long swords, and some held spears while others held bows and arrows with an axe. Because of their helmets covering their faces, one couldn’t tell if they were humans or something else.

Black Knights.

Kuze’s group, who didn’t know who or what they were, kept having those words go through their minds: black knights.

Kuze raised his voice to protect the children from that group which seemed to be a symbol of death.

“Don’t get any closer to those kids!”

They, without looking at him, indifferently started speaking in a low voice.

“What, who are these guys?”

“Hm, maybe some comedians for the castle?”

“I have heard that in this country they combined their militia and performers.”

From the beginning, they weren’t in the mood to talk. That’s the kind of impression they had.

“Well, either way, is fine.”

“Ah, that’s right. The orders are...”

They didn’t give any heed to Kuze’s warning at all, and one holding a bow drew his longsword. The other members started readying their weapons as well.

“Don’t let a single one live and step outside this castle.”

Their armor ground upon the floor as they drew closer to the children.

“You are going to harm civilians! This is a violation of the Geneva Convention. Stop immediately!”

Kuze gave a desperate warning. He raised his gun, and the black armor wearing group stepped into his line of sight. He put his finger on the safety. But, where they should be flinching, they just start laughing.

“Hahaha! This performer is deranged!”

“It’s quite humorous.”

“Kids, that group will keep you entertained all the way to Hell!”

As those rough words reverberated in the corridor, the kids gently grasped the fallen girl as fresh blood covered their young hands... The girl’s face was already pale. Death was quickly approaching.

The kids often came to the castle and saw many problems with the maid, as she was nothing less than a sister to them they couldn’t leave her side now.

Why did they have to meet such an irrational fate? Why did no one come to save her? The kids thought of a bedtime story the girl would tell them as they'd fall asleep by their bedside.

Whenever someone was in danger, the gods would send a brave hero to help. Was that brave hero anywhere around? The children looked up at the group of men on the other side.

They were a group of foreigners wearing strange green and light brown clothes. They had an expression of anguish strained upon their faces, staring over here with serious eyes.

“Big brothers! Please save us!”

(TL note: kids call older gentlemen this nicely, regardless of relation)

“Save big sis!”

The kids exclaimed. It's fine if they aren't brave, if they would save them then anyone would do.

Kuze in response to the children's screams from their hearts held his temper and bore the tragedy. That moment, Katou yelled near his ear.

“I confirmed a command to rescue the local civilians! Bring them to refuge to reduce the injustice against them immediately!”

(**Editor:** He literally said ‘injustice’)

Kuze was surprised at Katou's words. For a peacekeeping organization working for the government, the requirement for using weapons—the SDF is, again, made so as to defend oneself—so you are entrusted to have a large limit on the use of armed forces. Right now, those kids just asked us to save them. And, the commander, Katou, just accepted that request. With these conditions, then! Kuze scowled at the black knights before his eyes.

“Run...away...please...hurry...”

Mustering the last of her strength, the young girl said this to the children. But, they did not do as she had said.

“Waah! We won't do that, big sis! Please someone help!”

Next to the two, a black figure stood up. With long sword in hand, he made a posture to stab something below him.

“You’re loud. Savages should be quiet and DIE..!”

——And, something struck him, with the sound of three rounds reverberating in the area. The black armor blew off behind him, and he struck the wall, destroying it.

Kin!...Chin chin... (**Editor**: SFX of the cartridge hitting the floor)

Onto the marble floor, a gold cylinder rolled, making a delightful noise. That was a cartridge of the bullet of a NATO standard 5.56 mm high speed rifle, of which the black knights had no reason to know about.

Black smoke was coming forth from Kuze’s type 89 5.56 mm assault rifle’s mouth. To be sure to subdue them, Kuze didn’t take his time, but pulled the safety and fired three rounds in an instant.

“Wha-!?”

“Ruido!?”

The blood seeped out of him, and the other black knights standing near the wall noticed but could not understand what had happened in an instant.

They were stopped all movement in amazement. But, soon, they realized that the strange bunch in front of them had done something. Especially upon looking at their direction and seeing some sort of odd looking staff held by that young man.

“Yooooouuuuu!?”

“We’ll kill yooooouuuuuuu!”

Enraged, the group of men rushed to meet Kuze and company. It was clearly an act of hostility. In this situation, it was possible for Kuze and the company to have permission to fire.

“In reasonable defense, shoot-!”

In response to Kuze’s order, his men faced their guns to the black knights. And, in the blink of an eye, the fire of discharge was done. With a piercing shrill

of gunfire, they were showered with countless numbers of bullets.

“Ugh!?”

“Kyaagh..?!”

The black knights quickly fell. Though they wore armor, they were no match for the high-speed rifle bullets which can penetrate even bullet-proof clothes. The match was settled in five seconds.

“Cease Fire! Cease Fire! Stop shooting, you idiots!”

Kuze yelled at the highest his voice could get, and the shooting stopped.

“Fu-”

Katou covered his ears and stared at the sight. Not a single black knight was left: they were completely annihilated. They ate a rain of bullets from point blank range, what’s obvious is obvious.

“...Did I decide on a bit too much defense?”

While Kuze was changing his type 89 rifle ammo due to expending all his bullets, Katou asked this. His breath was short and violent. The hand used to hold the rifle was shaking. Katou took a good look at the face of Kuze, who had injured and killed the enemy.

To a SDF commander, if the time comes to use weapons on an enemy, it was of paramount importance to succeed. However, they aren’t emotionless machines; it’s not that simple. Katou was trying to think of some comforting words but surmised that it wouldn’t be appropriate and stopped. On the other hand, from Kuze’s eyes, he answered to someone of a higher rank and greater authority.

“No, I think it was an appropriate use of weaponry.”

“Let’s have that conversation after we survive and return home.”

Kuze, having just experienced real war, he was having an adrenaline rush of the highest order. After making a self-deprecating jest, a dry smile appeared upon his face, but after he realized it, he quickly made it disappear. And he focused his attention to the children. He noticed the most important thing. It seemed that there was still breath in the young girl.

“...That girl’s condition is!?”

“Thankfully, the arrow missed her spine. But, the bleeding is terrible, and if we’d remove the arrow there will be hemorrhaging! Shoot, it would have been good had we brought a medic squad!”

To his subordinate’s words, Kuze shook his head.

“Don’t start grumbling about things! Get a first-aid cover and carry her to the helicopter! The medical room on the transport vessel has medics and an operating room; if we make it in time she could be saved!”

“Understood! We’ll do what we can with the emergency kit!”

Kuze folded his knee, and from the children’s perspective they could tell by his kind tone of voice that he was doing what he could to help.

“You guys, come together with big sis. It’s fine...”

As he said this, the kids wondered exactly what was fine. In the middle of this battlefield, just what was fine? Then, Kuze broke down these thoughts.

“We’ll protect you guys! So it’ll be fine!”

The kids turned their weeping eyes to Kuze. Ah, it was to protect these children. That’s why he pulled the trigger...For the sake of protecting these small lives, they took the lives of ten or more people. And, when he looks at those lives that were protected, he thinks that it couldn’t be helped.

At least, they didn’t make a mistake in doing this. While Kuze was thinking of these things, the children made pure expressions and asked him a question.

“Big brother and guys, are you brave heroes?”

He didn’t understand what they meant by this question, but he answered anyway.

“...Sorry, but that’s wrong.”

“Then, what are you?”

Making a bitter face, he stroked the twos’ heads and murmured.

“We’re just your normal public servants...”

Part 2

“Take off as soon as Platoon Leader Kuze and company return. Hurry!”

The 3rd squad captain entrusted with the responsibility of guarding the heliport, Sergeant Yaegashi, yelled this to the pilot.

Eleven people protecting the four aircraft from the threat from all sides is difficult. Of course, the eleven members surrounding the aircraft which are in a diamond shape on the ground have to be on guard.

Presently, they haven't seen any intention from the dragons to harm those over here, and since they're so high up it's not like they could shoot them if they wanted to.

“Un-understood! Starting systems activated!”

Flustered, the pilot began the preparations to restart the engine. The sound of the engine heating up sharply reverberated as the blades slowly began to turn. But, it would still take some time before it had enough power for take off. That short wait can feel like an eternity.

“S-seriously...”

“Terrible...”

The guard in the helicopters' vicinity were overwhelmed by the sight before their eyes. The town was being burned down. The sky was covered in black dragons and black giant birds. The giant birds would go to the ground and the soldiers riding on their backs would get off and the birds would set off flying again. The dragons would spot people, and whether they were soldiers or a group of young girls, they would without any discrimination open their mouths, spit out flames, and slaughter them.

This was a fearsome example of what would be done when they refused to become slaves. No, this is reality. Fear spread like a disease.

If the people of Mariisua knew just a little of what would happen, instead of animosity, this periphery kingdom would have been fearful of the empire, probably. For that reason. For that reason alone.

This peacekeeping force was witnessing a massacre in front of its eyes. But, there wasn't a thing the members could do about it. Because there was no permission or order concerning it.

As far as the SDF is concerned, all movements required an order or permission. For instance, it is needed even to protect human life. To a military where only protecting your own skin is not subject to punishment, what is allowed?

Ichinose couldn't help but want to run and escape the place after seeing the horror at the castle grounds. It was already enough.

Not only were they thrown into a parallel world, but now it looked like they were going to become dragged into a war. He quickly wanted to return to his original world. He went on his way to retreat to the helicopters. He ran. Suddenly, he could hear someone's voice. It was a young girl's voice.

"Everyone! As many citizens as possible, get into the castle for shelter!"

"Oh, we understand. Let's join our efforts and go."

"Look at us now, you dastardly people of the Empire!"

It was Rarona. A little earlier it was made clear why she was so afraid. She knew about the picture of Hell that is now unfolding. But, right now, you don't see any fear in her as she holds the reigns of her giant bird while raising the troop's morale.

...What's going on?

"O-oy!?"

Ichinose went running to where they are. Rarona was able to recognize his figure from her bird.

"Ah, Ichinose, what are you doing? If you don't hurry and get ready to run, it'll be terrible, right?"

"What's terrible is for your side, no?"

“Huh? What is?”

“Y-you’re not gonna fly that thing in there, are you? You-you’ll die?!”

“I don’t know about dying, but you’re telling me to live without doing anything?”

“Ah...no, that’s not it but...”

Ichinose could not believe the young girl in front of his eyes. She’s much younger than him, but he could see that she was much more of an adult than him. And, those eyes saw and understood. She wants to fight. To protect her country and to save others. That is, for her pride. Ichinose offered no further words.

“Ichinose, it should be good to go back to your original world!”

Rarona said this and grinned. Ichinose, dumbfounded, took in the girl’s smile. Up until now, he had he had never seen such a pure smile.

“Ichinose! What are you doing?! Hurry, return to the LZ!”

Ichinose was surprised at the voice of the squad commander coming through the radar.

Yes, what is he doing? If he got left behind in this place, what would he do? Suddenly struck with anxiety, he went to return to the helicopter flustered. That was the time. Ichinose realized that his surroundings were suddenly covered in darkness

“Eh...?”

And he quickly turned to look behind him. There was the castle wall, but above that was...

Gurururu...

A black dragon was there. Its body length was probably greater than fifteen meters. It was a wicked dragon covered in ominous looking scales and had claws that looked like it's ready to pull and tear apart humans in one attack. It was an overwhelming presence. With a fushu-su, vapor overflowed from his mouth.

"Enemy attack-!"

Numerous palace guards present threw their lances and shot their arrows. Ichinose, too surprised and too scared to stand, started running away via crawling. The arrows and lances were repelled like toys off the black dragon's scales and fell to the ground. In the next moment, the dragon's atrocious breath was launched toward the guards.

"Gyaaaaaagh!!"

The screams of agony and death reached Ichinose's ears. The surroundings became scorching hot, and the stench of burning people floated about. While Ichinose seems to be halfway from crying, he was running about trying to escape. From behind him came a loud noise. He looked behind him, and there was a dragon. It had followed him this far. Who knows how many people it had already burned and killed. That dragon in which not a single bit of compassion could be felt from its heart, but which had a terrifyingly atrocious glint in its eye looked down to Ichinose.

"A...uwa..."

Ichinose froze in fear.

"Ichinose! Run!"

Rarona's screaming voice reverberated, a black shadow moved.

"W-waaah!?"

I'm gonna get killed, he thought. But, then the black shadow passed over him.

"...Eh?"

Unsure of what happened, he confusedly looked ahead to see that the dragon was heading toward the readied helicopters. He felt a chill on his back.

"Th-this is bad!!"

By the time he screamed, it was too late. The dragon approached a Black Hawk and moved to attack it with its giant claws.

"Dangerous creature approaching!"

"We won't let you get so close! F-fire! Fiiiire!"

To Sergeant Yaegashi's orders, the surrounding three members pulled out their type 89 rifles to counter the beast. But, maybe it's a habit of the SDF, but maybe it's that the method of shooting was to shoot only once, perhaps it was that of the three only two people faced the menace in the sky and shot, but the dragon didn't take any damage. They were moving with the knowledge that many animals run from the sound of a gunshot.

Paying no mind to the gunshots, the black shadow leaned close to the helicopter. The pilot, flustered, moved to takeoff, but it's not as though the helicopter is defenseless before taking off.

They thought the black dragon was just above them when they heard a loud, dull noise reverberate as though a metal noise hit them. One of the rotor blades were hit.

The helicopter's balance was destroyed, and the helicopter was overturned, headed for a collision course with the castle wall and falling to the beautiful, blossomed flowers of the flowerbed. The remaining rotor blades started bending back and forth before scattering apart. A cloud of dust rose up, and the

field of vision was temporarily inhibited.

“Uwaaagh!?”

“Take cover! Take cover!”

You wouldn't see the members guarding the aircraft because they ran to avoid being injured by the helicopter crash debris. For the remaining three aircraft to escape carrying the platoon became an impossible situation. If they'd try, the dragon would surely attack them.

Either way, the control of the skies had been stolen in the middle of the battlefield, and if they just accommodated this, there would be no way to make a safe return to the fleet. At this rate, there would be no route for a temporarily retreating helicopter. If ever the option appeared to either have some escape or get every last aircraft annihilated, no matter how cold-hearted it may seem, the duty to choose the very best option lies with the pilot.

“Take emergency measures to get to shelter! Take off!”

“This is the Green 2, taking off!”

One plane, then another one, planned to escape while the black dragon isn't coming to get them. The members above ground were left behind.

“O-oy, the remaining helicopters are...!?”

“Stop!? Come back!”

They shouted from the grounds while seeing the helicopters flying away, dancing in a cloud of dust. But, under the enemy's control of the skies, the helicopters running away can't go back, no matter how desperate it is.

After the helicopter escaped, all that remained in the courtyard was a despairing silence.

“They left me behind...”(Editor:We don’t know what this is! There were many of them but only ichinose is mentioned)

Ichinose sat down and murmured. That time, footsteps closing in on the courtyard and many people drew closer.

It was Kuze and company. There were also kids carrying a severely injured young girl, so it took him a bit of time to tell it was them.

“What was that noise earlier?! Wha-!”

Kuze looked at the terrifying scene in the courtyard, and his face grew pale. The crashed helicopter and the missing helicopters with the members left behind. For him to understand that something happened didn’t take much time.

And— —

“They ...!”

Kuze scowled at the wreckage of the plane and the silhouette of the black dragon visible as the dust cloud settled. The black dragon wasn’t moving. But, with the dragon there, he knew that he could not get much closer to the pilot who had crashed to see if he could rescue him. His subordinates also realized they couldn’t get any closer.

“Second Lieutenant Kuze! You were OK!”

The subordinates of the 3rd squad led by Sergeant Yaegashi looked at Squad 1 and Squad 2 as though an earnest hope had taken hold of them.

Kuze gave a large nod to them, and in a flash raised his voice.

“Sergeant Yaegashi, come with me!”

“Eh? Y-yes!”

Kuze removed all the equipment that would be a hassle and yelled to the 31 gathered underlings.

“Yaegashi and I will board the crashed helicopter! Those remaining here, take cover! If the dragon moves, shoot it!”

Kuze brought his type 89 rifle and made off to escape.

“Second Lieutenant Kuze, exactly what are you planning to do?!”

Yaegashi questioned him. The rest of the underlings felt the same. Kuze surveyed the subordinates and broke down an explanation of what he is doing.

“At this rate, we can’t help the pilot. And the other planes can’t land here! At least not while that guy is here!”

Kuze glared at the courtyard. The underlings’ breath was taken away looking at Kuze’s expression.

“N-no way...!?”

“Yo-you intend on defeating it !?”

To their words, Kuze nodded his head. And, he informed Yaegashi of his sense of responsibility.

“Sorry Yaegashi, but normally you’d be the shooter; it is your responsibility to

help shoot it.”

He left his words at that and then started running towards the crashed helicopter 100 meters ahead of him. Yaegashi followed after him. The remaining underlings prepared and aimed their guns, waiting and was prepared to fire a screen of bullets if the dragon got close to Kuze’s group.

Kuze struggled his way to the crashed plane, and forced open the side door. Maybe it was a transformation from all the shock, but he managed to gather the necessary strength. While he was opening the door he worried that the dragon would come at him, but somehow the dragon didn’t show signs of moving since a while ago. Kuze and Yaegashi finally got inside the helicopter. The aircraft was literally upside down. Belongings were scattered everywhere, and there wasn’t a really good place to walk.

“Is that Se-second Lieutenant K-kuze...?”

“Pilot, are you alright?”

Kuze stepped up to the pilot in the cockpit. Perhaps it was because they got cut on the broken front glass, but the pilot and vice pilot’s faces were covered in blood.

“The altitude wasn’t that high, so we aren’t dead, but...who knows how many things are broken...the feet are probably fractured...ugh.”

“M-me too...”

Kuze had to make a decision in such anguishing circumstances.

“I’m afraid we’ll have to put off the aid for now. Please bear it.”

“U-understood...”

The two firmly answered. However, these two, like that girl, needed to be

carried to the transport vessel. Their internal organs had been damaged from the shock of the crash.

And— —

“It’s here, Second Lieutenant Kuze!”

Yaegashi found it among the belongings in the upside down helicopter. While they were running, Kuze gave him an order to look for it.

“Alright, you hold the ammo.”

Kuze took it from his hands, carried it on his shoulders, and prepared to escape the aircraft. Wedged between his shoulders, it was heavy.

“That’s bad, Second Lieutenant Kuze! He just moved in that direction.”

Through the radio, the scream like voices of the subordinates reverberated. He could hear sound of continuous shots of the type 89 rifle. The underlings fired a blanket of bullets so the dragon wouldn’t go closer to that place. But, the sound of the impact of these bullets made Kuze shudder.

A shrill sound of metal reverberated. The bullets could not penetrated the dragon’s scales. No, not a single bullet heavily injured it anywhere. Kuze turned around from the side of the wreckage to see a giant shadow towering above him. The cloud of dust finally subsided.

“That’s...!?”

Kuze opened his eyes wide. That there was a black dragon there was undeniable. But, it was an injured black dragon. Fresh blood was dripping onto the ground.

“Did this one get a rotor blade?”

Kuze confirmed a gaping open scar on the black dragon’s waist. This black

dragon didn't know anything about helicopters. It may not have seen the high-speed revolving rotor blades, or maybe didn't know the dangers of it. So, it made contact with the blade, and got injured.

"I-it's fine if it's a bit dim..."

Yaegashi revealed a blunt thought. As though he got some courage, face-to-face in that place, Kuze took what was on his shoulders and pointed it toward the black dragon.

During this time, the black dragon slowly took one step and another step toward Kuze and company, as if it were saying it wouldn't forgive the humans who injured it. After its injury, it is brimming with battle spirit, visible in its eyes. For victory, its significance is its tenacity.

"Roooooooooaaaaar!"

It was a roar that pervaded the entirety of the castle. To Kuze, that intense pressure was like atmospheric pressure. But, he didn't flinch.

"Sergeant Yaegashi! The load!"

To the one who got injured by getting caught up in the rotor blades, it didn't feel like it was going to lose. That thing Kuze was carrying on his shoulders was an 84 mm recoilless anti-tank gun, so naturally it packed a lot of power.

It is a heavy weapon used ever since the deployment to Iraq, when it was used against terrorism in the form of exploding vehicles, for the camps got the permission to use it as reserves. For this time's recon mission, they only got permission to carry one.

"Anti-tank gun prepared to be loaded to fire!"

From an olive drab colored cylindrical fiber case, Yaegashi took the bullets and opened the back opening, and pushed the ammo into the gun barrel.

“The tail is prepared; loading complete! The rear is safe! Ready to fire!”

Yaegashi screamed, and to let Kuze know that the preparations for firing were complete, and he lightly tapped Kuze on the back of the head. To prepare for the force of the blast, Kuze could feel Yaegashi clinging to his waist. At the same time, they could see the dragon take in a breath.

That is, it was preparing to let loose its fire breath onto Kuze and company, and they had a hunch it wouldn't take long. Kuze had a flashback in his mind about what he saw on the terrace, of the palace guards getting burned and dying. If he doesn't fire, his crew will get wrapped up in that hellfire with only death awaiting them.

“Why do we have such an unpleasant duty?”

He grumbled in the middle of such a limit-pushing situation. They're firing at such a fearsome power with heavy weaponry without prior notice. It's the big blunder of the SDF since it started. Already, it's like any chance of him getting a promotion is hopeless. The black dragon opened its mouth wide. It showed the red part inside of its mouth.

“Take responsibility!”

That moment, Kuze pressed the trigger of the 84 mm recoilless anti-tank weapon to fire. The mouth of the weapon lit up, and the fierce back blast of the thing pulled the tail to be felt by Kuze and Yaegashi. And, at point-blank range, they shot the high-explosive projectile from the barrel of the anti-tank weapon; with a high-speed spin, it was headed for the mouth of the dragon.

With one blast the black dragon was now made defenseless with its fire breath as this weapon meant to bypass the armor of tanks headed for its throat, and then the fuse went off, causing an explosion.

Having that weapon meant to go against tanks explode made the fire breath's stream burst, destroying the black dragon's insides to smithereens. The wind

from the blast was so fierce as to turn Kuze and Yaegashi over.



Part 3

While Karuda was cracking down on the Empire forces invading the castle, she came upon a place facing the courtyard.

Half of the commanding soldiers are her subordinates, and half were a mix of castle guards and imperial guard forces. There was an overflow of skill there, and against strong opponents, like the Empire's Black Knights, they were like a crack in a sword, exhausted.

Somehow, when she was looking at the courtyard, 30% of her subordinates near her were getting taken out. A melancholy premonition took over her. Inside, the numbers were devastating with attrition rate. Outside, the defense force had to go against the black dragons and the freeze dragons.

According to the runner's report, the defense force for the castle walls were already destroyed. At this point, the battle was already terrible for this side. The castle walls no longer serve any purpose.

And, though she didn't want to think about it, to defeat the dragons they had no weapons, warriors or magic capable of such a feat. She thought about how it would be impossible to defeat the dragon knights based on numbers alone. She shouldn't have thought that.

Yes, she saw the sight of that courtyard with those managing to survive. There, she saw the one who called himself Kuze, that unreliable man who came from a parallel world. He was in a rather unsightly form, she thought, since his subordinate was clinging onto his waist.

And, Kuze was holding some kind of fat staff that he was pointing to the threatening and approaching black dragon. In front of that black dragon's roar, his head must have gotten a few screws loose. However, in the next moment, that happened. The black dragon burst open, threatening flames and all.

"Th...tha...tha..."

Karuda could not quickly grasp what had just happened in front of her eyes.

In One attack.

The dragon was defeated in one attack. By that unreliable-seeming so-called Kuze guy.

How?

Err, from that fat staff he shouldered, a flash ran out, she thought, and then the dragon exploded.

Some form of exploding magic? That has to be it. It seems that Kuze guy is actually a high-level magic soldier.

Those weird garments, that odd staff looking thing that persuaded her. He was a magic warrior from a parallel world.

Yes, they were——

“Rune Troopers...!”

With quivering lips, she said this aloud.

“We killed it!”

“Leading Private Nakamura! Bring three people with you and aid the helicopter pilots!”

Their flustered screaming did not reach Karuda’s ears. She was convinced. As to why Her Majesty Hamieea would be so obsessive over them.

“This battle...”

Karuda mumbled softly.

“We still don’t know what’s gonna happen.”

In a parallel world, on the battlefield, a small accident occurred.

Chapter 4: In the Midst of War

Part 1

The Inheritance Empire's plan to capture Sei road with a southern attack using mixed forces was continuing as planned. The highest possible level of command one could take, the 4th level shogun, had an expression of great composure.

Currently, the castle close to the main road is being strained. The Inheritance Empire planned to block out any escape routes for Mariisua's nobles and monarch, not letting a single one escape.

Mariisua most likely did not calculate that they would be attacked the following day after accepting the declaration of war. And they shouldn't have thought about the castle being under siege like this. Combined with all the bases being attacked, at a minimum, the castle should probably be captured by sunset.

The 4th level shogun Rihyalda Von Adora stared at the fires cropping up at the Sei road castle while she heard the slight resistance the enemy mustered, and this made her

optimistic. Rihyalda was a princess general from the nobility of the western side of the empire. She was only 25 years old.

Though it is on the front lines of battle in a meritocracy, she was young. With skin so pale you could almost see through it, she had shoulder-length silver hair that would shine in the sun. If she weren't wearing her jet black armor, one could almost mistake her for a saint with the beauty she held.

"Report!"

She thought a shadow may have appeared, and then a giant dragon landed in front of her eyes. The skin of the unique dragon from the north would blend in

with snow, so it was a
freeze dragon.

The ability to take the castle by surprise on the first day of war can be attributed to the permission to mobilize the dragon knights from their nation and to no other squad.

Again, their fighting gives the troops much boost in morale. This was mainly because of the ice and snow dragon knight unit's power and the black fire dragon knight unit's power, or 2 dragon knight units were added to join the fight this time. Against such a weak and small nation like Mariisua, it could be said it was overkill.

"What is it?"

Rihyalda faced the dragon knight probably around the same age as her father and asked in a sharp voice. The destruction of the castle and city were dependent on all the dragon knights. The question she put forward was about reprimanding them leaving their post.

"Hurriedly, I would deign to let you know something."

The veteran dragon knight was shaking.

"What?"

"...Near the castle in Sei road, a black dragon of the black dragon knights was killed!"

"Wha-?!"

A rare, sagacious expression resounded on Rihyalda's face. The surrounding aides who had heard did the same at once.

"Even if it is the enemy's base, to think that Mariisua has a knight unit capable of defeating a black dragon is..."

Rihyalda made a grim expression.

But, this was a battlefield. Plenty of unexpected situations will happen. One shouldn't get flustered.

"Well, about that..."

“What, spit it out.”

“...The black dragon was taken out by only one person.”

“One person!?”

Rihyalda and company were in astonishment. For a dragon to be defeated by one person was, realistically, impossible. It was not so simple for an attack or magic to get past a dragon's scales.

A black dragon has been defeated in the past, but that was in an ambush by the enemy's military with 3 knight units and 2 magic units fighting carefully.

A dragon which won't be defeated by anything less than that, being defeated by a single person... There shouldn't be this much reserve force in sneak-attacked, confused Mariisua.

“That wasn't you incorrectly perceiving the event?”

There was nothing else she could think of to explain what happened. On the battlefield, unreliable information and rumors can fly about.

“There is no mistake. Even if it would cost me my life, this is the state of affairs. The man wore odd clothes with a green and brown mixed pattern, carried a large log-looking cylinder on his shoulder, and I think he recited some sort of spell, and then the dragon exploded to pieces.”

“Impossible!”

Rihyalda started to laugh at the impossible nonsense she had heard. But, the head of the dragon knights giving her the report was curious. Trampling over his story to that degree might make her foolish.

This dragon knight and those around him are well trusted, experienced veterans. Frankly, he had no reason to twist a story into a lie. In her heart, she half believed but half doubted him, but in the end, she believes her subordinates.

“What does our war situation look like after losing the dragon?”

“Though half of the castle is under our control, the fallen dragon and such an enemy strength may cause a stalemate. Currently, in order to capture the castle, we should have the 500 soldiers we've deployed gather in the castle.”

The loss of the dragon hurts, but there is no damage done to the objective. There's enough military force, in spades.

"I see. Good job on the report. You may go. Hurry and prepare the soldiers for an offensive attack."

"Yes, ma'am!"

Once again, his dragon fluttered off, and as a freeze dragon, it left a cold breeze when it set off to fly. In the middle of such a favorable war situation, a small disaster coming about gave Rihyalda a bad feeling.

But, as a military person of the empire's forces, to have a feeling of worry come out would be unforgivable. If the current situation goes smoothly, then she can think about it later: she corrected her thinking.

"Could this be quite the bother...?"

A hoarse voice reached her ears. Annoyed, she turned around and the mage dispatched from her nation made an eerie smile.

...His name was Genful, according to her memory. The man looking back at her was a reinforcement to the dragon knights, and he ordered the barrier troops. If it were someone of high social standing, it would be a different story, but normally having those off the battlefield like those barrier troops to voice their opinions after listening to a problem given in a report is most disliked by the military people of the Inheritance Empire.

With his age, where he's from, and his social status not being clearly known, this man with only a title emerged in the middle of the military people. There's not even a particular reason that the barrier troop needs a mage over them. There must have been a different reason for him coming here.

"Oh no, this is nothing to worry yourself over, Mr. Barrier Troops Commander. It is still unconfirmed information, and the first part of the plan went exactly as desired, and we will move forward without delay."

"That would be excellent."

Rihyalda softly clicked her tongue at the figure returning to a hastily made

tent behind her. In this provocation, the little uneasiness she felt to the report earlier disappeared. She once again turned her piercing eyes onto the battlefield.

Part 2

The helicopter that left for recon returned to the vessel without the officers, and the crew on the vessel was confused. On the deck of the transport vessel, they were servicing the helicopter and refueling it. They regretted having to leave the others behind, but the pilots followed orders to fly even in dangerous circumstances.

“...I think your decision was appropriate.”

On the “Ibuki” destroyer’s bridge was a seated officer. Sitting there was Kaburagi, who answered such after hearing the report from the pilots on the radio. He had no intention of accusing them of causing danger of their group’s annihilation.

“After refueling and maintenance, please fly off once more! Please go again!”

“Understood....we’ll wait on your orders.”

Kaburagi finished the transmission. They sympathized with their feelings, and their chests hurt. The subordinates too would not likely give any criticism of their actions. Attacked by a monster, staying there and shooting it standing by the troops above ground could result in the whole troop being destroyed.

Continuing, switching channels, they hear Katou’s report. Kaburagi moved to quickly and calmly answer. For their highest commander to lose his cool in front of the subordinates would affect the morale.

“...Then, to gather the injured including the private citizens, you’d need an emergency helicopter, right?”

From now on, Kaburagi would deal with this urgent situation. The crash of the one helicopter and the injuries of the pilots. Add to that the surgery for the huge injuries of that little girl from the Eastern Sea Mariisua United Kingdom in this parallel world. There were severe choices to consider and simulate.

“Commander Kaburagi, we are in a very difficult position. How do we move on the battlefield: we may have to make decisions in these matters.”

Kaburagi looked down. Even for the greatest commander, it was hard to make

these kinds of decisions.

“What do you think about this?”

“With the photographic data from the camera, we should be able to confirm what’s happening over there.”

“Ah. It’s terrible here.”

Everything is confirmed if you include the film data from the helicopter that escaped. What reflected into the camera lens was a one-sided invasion and massacre.

To call it a sense of justice would be dangerous, but any normal, decent person seeing what was transpiring would feel a sense of righteous indignation at the scene. But, despite all this, Kaburagi needed to endure it given his position.

“I, as a member of the military, have decided to stop the fighting.”

Hearing Katou’s words, Kaburagi became silent. That was the right response, but for the organization where you need permission for so much known as the Japanese Self-Defense Force, it was not so simple. In the past, the SDF was dispatched overseas.

However, still, there is no regulation for making decisions on the off chance they run into a battle aside from “surely that won’t happen, so it’ll be OK,” but that is what is happening on those shores right now. According to the SDF battle rules, talking about it at least is taboo.

“For the SDF, is this right?”

Kaburagi certainly asked. Katou would have expected a sort of loophole.

“Say it frankly, even if it seems wrong.”

Kaburagi sighed.

“Then...”

“To begin with, Commander Kaburagi,”

“What?”

“As the military, we are in a position to protect those suddenly under unjust

aggression. Though there is no resolution on it from the security council. But, Mariisua and this empire are not members of the United Nations.”

“...So, we can permit action beyond the scope of the law?”

“The SDF has always sacrificed at the scene of the crime. Probably, this is also the time to do such. That, and if we abandon the nation here, we could become true drifters.”

Kaburagi felt some pressure from katou’s forceful tone.

“Drifters?”

“Yes. So long as we do nothing to return to our original world and do nothing to get a good footing in this new one, we could get dragged into a war outside of our pace and could die.”

“You’re thinking too much.”

“The one who can see the current situation and not over think things is just an idiot.”

Katou said with an air of conviction. Just knowing about the scene of the fighting created a sense of impending danger. Kaburagi also understood this. In the past, there was an incident involving mine-sweeping at the Persian coast.

One wrong step and not only his but his whole unit’s lives would be gone—that’s what kind of operation it was. There, such an easygoing thought as “you’re thinking too much” never came. The form was different, but that Persian coast was also a battlefield.

“What should we do?”

He was not merely wondering, Kaburagi was asking as the head chief. Katou took a deep breath, decided upon his thoughts, and spoke.

“We will protect this castle. We must do what is possible, to protect their lives as well. As the SDF, I have decidedn that this is right.”

Silence floated about the two of them.

“Understood, what you say. Besides, you are a couple step ahead, aren’t you?”

“Well, I do have a thorough plan.”

“That’s enough. As a commander of the SDF and a statesman, a guy who can’t-do at least that much is too much to handle.”

To Kaburagi’s sarcasm, Katou bitterly smiled.

“Please switch with Second Lieutenant Kuze.”

Kaburagi thought he should speak with one more commander.

“Yes, this is Second Lieutenant Kuze.”

It was the voice of a young man still 24 years old. When Kaburagi was his age, there was probably a situation which pushed the envelope like this one.

But, he didn’t have such a ridiculous job to do as a commander in the SDF back then. He is a higher class. But, he had the maximum amount of respect possible and ordered that way.

“Second Lieutenant Kuze, give an order to your land SDF troops.”

“Yes?”

“Ensure the Seiroad heliport. Again, this is as a military order to protect the front lines and citizens. I will bear all the responsibility for using that weapon.”

“Roger.”

In reality, it was battle instructions. Since there were orders, Kuze must follow them. Kaburagi held at least his feeling of guilt. And, he added one last thing.

“...Please, Second Lieutenant Kuze. Beyond hurting people, protect as many people as you can.”

“Understood. Protect the Seiroad castle and those citizens who welcomed us to the bitter end.”

Part 3

The transmission relaying an unreasonable order ended, and Sergeant Yaegashi acted.

“The weapon ammunition we could gather from the helicopter wreckage is just this.”

Placing down new ammunition cases for 200 rounds for light machine guns, Yaegashi said this.

“So, what we’re holding all put together’s battle strength is what?”

Kuze asked with a thinking face. This is an important concern for a legitimate battle.

“Thirty-two soldiers, thirty-one type 89 shotgun rifles, enough ammunition for a hundred and twenty shots. Two MINIME light machine guns, and enough ammunition for 800 shots. For rifle bullets, we have 6 shots, and two hand grenades. After these, those in the family of the portable recoilless 84 mm rifle and the anti-tank highly explosive projectiles, we have two shots left.”

“If we use these, do you think we’ll persevere?”

Kuze leveled his binoculars.

“...Roughly 400, no, 500 of them are left. And, they’re still increasing.”

Kuze’s group is currently laying preparations to protect the entrance to the corridor leading to the throne room inside the palace. Across from the courtyard, the empire’s forces were gathering.

The distance was something like 300 meters. In between them and Kuze’s group was a sort of buffer zone made by the corpse of the dragon. The parts across from the castle seemed to have already fallen. The battle flag waved, and they faced the tips of their spears to heaven.

Lance soldiers and archery forces around formed ranks, and they started this

way. The formation seemed ready to go, but there was no sign of their attacking anytime now. Probably, they were cautious after the situation with the dragon. But, there was no change in the pressure they were exuding. In this situation, letting the helicopter land would be difficult, though——

“What’s with the emergency helicopter? Even if it is just the seriously wounded, if they aren’t moved soon...”

To these words of that subordinate, Kuze grew impatient. But, he couldn’t do anything. There were other things to worry about. Kuze confirmed his back. The corridor was full of refugees. It was long and wide near the throne room, so there were probably over 3,000 people there.

The empire forces also went to attack the city. From that, it looks as though many sought refuge in the castle as the city became dangerous. In the midst of confusion, they desperately escaped the city, and while the castle was being attacked, ran here. Because of this, many are injured. The injured were sorted out, but they probably lightly moved past the four helicopters.

“Big brother...big sister...”

Kuze, who had begun peeking through binoculars, had his sleeve pulled. When he looked, he saw those kids who were with the maid looking up at him. Yaegashi, who had earlier heard the report of the children, whispered into his ear.

“We may no longer be able to save that girl.”

Kuze felt a sense of powerlessness and guilt, and averted his eyes from the children. The kids have forcibly pushed away, but he was supposed to stay and ensure the heliport. However, preemptive strikes are wholly prohibited to the SDF. An act so far would not be allowed. In the middle of this dilemma, the young girl seemed as though she were to lose her life.

“I’m sorry...I can’t do anything of use...”

Kuze had to bring a sad reply to the children. Tears surfaced in the eyes of those children looking up at Kuze. At that time——

“You are that hero who slew that dragon, no?”

A female voice came from the side. Looking at her, she was probably a refugee, the young girl standing there had long hair the color of the deep ocean., She looked about 15 years old. She was wearing what looked to be ceremonial vestments with a pure white and deep blue motif. With her pure atmosphere, Kuze thought she might be a priestess or that she may hold some other sacred profession.

“He-hey, Ryumi, these are the people who shot off that thing...”

“They came to save us, and they are now confronting the invaders. Further, those were such gentle eyes turned towards the children.. Certainly, this is not a bad man.”

The young girl called Ryumi did not hear out her associate, sweetly smiled, and laughed. Kuze looked at that pure face.

“I know not of where you come from, but if there is anything I can do, no matter what it is, just ask. I, despite how things stand, am a priestly warrior of the Light Mother Church, and I have some knowledge of healing magic.”

In her words, there was something Kuze was not used to hearing.

“Healing...magic?”

“Yes. It is a miracle that is loaned just a bit by the gods. As you can see, there are many injured people to help. I think I would also like to help. To heal with magic is a good specialty.”

At the girl in front of him with her hands put together as if to pray, Kuze looked at the faces of the subordinates around him.

Magic. Surely, she said magic. It must be a joke, Yaegashi said with his eyes. But, Kuze had a thought, clutching at straws, and asked the girl.

“This is a person I want you to help!”

He and Yaegashi brought Ryumi with them to the place where the maid lay. Ryumi took a breath at the figure of the girl with an arrow in her back. The young girl couldn't move except for twitching, making one wonder if she had already died.

“We applied morphine to put her to sleep, but her condition was just getting worse.”

“Morphine?” said Ryumi, and she tilted her head. To her, Kuze explained that it was a pain-relieving

medication. Satisfied, Ryumi approached the young girl and touched her body. She closed her eyes and whispered something like a spell.

Kuze had his eyes fixated on the spectacle. A faint light flowed from her hands, and her body began to move. And, to the pale young girl's skin returned just a little vitality.

“...After healing, let's take that arrowhead out.”

While Ryumi was focused on healing her, Kuze said this.

“Magic.”

“Real magic.”

At this unbelievable thought, Kuze turned his face and look into Yaegashi, next to him.

“Is she saved?”

“That is something only the gods know...Fureena, you also help.”

“Oh man, you don’t know?”

Her lamenting colleague come to help. Ryumi started healing the young girl with another person. Something only the gods know, eh. Kuze thought as he looked at Ryumi that if there are gods, she is one.

“But, to continue the healing magic, we will need silence. If the enemy comes over here...”

Ryumi spoke out of anxiety. She had a fear of the 500 military men across the courtyard crowded and in a complete formation. But, Kuze answered in a reassuring tone.

“Please calm down.”

He got out his firearm into his hand and said in a firm voice.

“The empire forces will not make it here.”

He entrusted the young girl with her and returned to commanding the operations.

“Lieutenant Colonel Katou, please stay near the communication device and relay to the fleet what is happening. To use the full power of the platoon is unexpected, so this is an attack of manpower.”

“Understood. I will transmit the war situation in full to the fleet.”

Katou took the long distance communication device from the member who had it. To a marine commander who had almost no training in fighting on land, he couldn't go out to the front lines.

“Squad leader Karuda, may I have your attention?”

“Yes. What?”

Kuze called the name of the Mariisua officer who left a while before and was standing to examine the situation. He perceived the slit eye behind her monocle.

“Just for a little, I would like a lot of furniture and goods.”

“What for?”

“To construct a barricade.”

Karuda made a face of resolute dubiousness. But, in such a war to prepare the gunfire weapons, this was no time for argument.

“It is necessary so that we can fire when we meet with the empire's forces.”

“...Well, in this time of crisis, there's no reason to refuse.”

Obtaining permission, Kuze quickly ordered the subordinate and went to work on the operation. Thirty two people started building the improvised structure that could hide some people here and there. They had a plan to dig a trench at the opening of the corridor, but it would take too much time, so it wasn't proper. It was awkward, but they quickly built the thing.

Using a bed and a bookcase, the members moved to make something which could hold members and things inside and protect them from arrows. There were many expensive things that if added together would be a very large expense, but in such an emergency situation, no one worried about such things.

“We will help, too!”

“Rarona?”

While Ichinose was surprised, the Flying Light Armor Unit's survivors joined in one after the other. Everyone, for some reason, seemed happy to help the SDF members. Ichinose was perplexed, and Rarona, full of vigor, said.

“This is unreasonable with just 30 people. If you're fighting the empire, it is no wonder we will help you.”

The young girl said this and smiled like a young boy, showing her white teeth.

“Thank you, Ichinose. Being able to help even this many refugees is thanks to you guys.”

“...I didn't do anything.”

While they placed the shelf, Ichinose couldn't look Rarona in the eyes.

Part 4

“O-i, Second Lieutenant Kuze, we have contact from the fleet. When the courtyard is safely secured, the helicopter corps will come this way there.”

“Roger.”

Katou delivered the report from behind the unit, and Kuze breathed a sigh of relief. The construction of the barricade as complete; it didn't look attractive, but the improvised interception was complete. After that, what's left is whether or not that bunch is going to come here or not. Kuze gave a signal to his subordinates.

“Leading Private Ueno, leading Private Yamakawa, control the machine gun operation. Sergeant Kotegawa and Sergeant Sasajima, attach the alignment device for rifle bullets. We can't use rifle bullets at a short distance. Once they attack, go at full power until exhaustion. Everyone, get to a place where it is easy to throw hand grenades. Take note of the safety pin placement.”

And, he watched the empire force across the courtyard, using binoculars. Probably, the current stalemate wouldn't last much longer. If you'll notice, a tall woman—Karuda—was next to Kuze, standing. As she was hiding in the barricade, she was looking up.

The barricade was something made to protect the body from high-angled arrows. To effectively hide the body, someone tall needed to do a half crouch. Clinging to the ground was the defensive measure of the modern era foot soldier, and next to that was the noble, standing female knight.

“Unit Leader Karuda? What is it?”

Karuda pointed her eyes showing her so-cold-you-can't-guess emotions to Kuze. There wasn't hostility in it, but there wasn't favor in it either.

“Why go so far?”

She asked standing alone.

“Is it a reason to save people's lives?”

“Ah, so it is. Especially as soldiers as well, it’s fine.”

Next to Kuze, she sat down. Now was a good time, as they were alone together as the others were preparing and setting up formation around the ammunition. Her long, green hair blew in the ocean haze. A sweet smell was about. Kuze, without thinking, stared at her profile. Without the intense situation and that dark as a mourning dress black overcoat, she’d probably be very beautiful.

“So we’ll hold off the empire’s forces here?”

“That’s the plan. To save the refugees, that’s our only option.”

“...Justice?”

“Eh?”

“Chivalry, or rather, the way of the gods, is that sort of justice why you’re fighting?”

“I don’t understand such a troublesome thing, but...we are the SDF. We only allow fighting to protect. So, I don’t know.”

“To protect...the civilians, including me?”

“Ultimately, yes.”

He managed to skirt around a dangerous question. But, such a meaningful question was unable to be answered by him anyhow. Karuda looked Kuze in the eyes.

“Thank you.”

“There’s no need to thank us, and we’re fighting to aid the Mariisua military, which wasn’t enough against the threat.”

“No, this is a gratitude from me, personally.”

Kuze was in amazement at the unexpected words.

“If this is not the way of the knights from a parallel world, and you can’t accept it from the nation, I am giving you my personal applause.”

“These are unmerited words, Unit Leader Karuda.”

“Just Karuda is fine, Kuze-dono.”

She changed her expression just a tad. And, changing her tone to just a little bit of a teasing one, said.

“Kuze-dono, this is your first time seeing a real war, huh?”

“...You understand that?”

“Yeah.”

And, Karuda took her lance in her hand and abruptly looked up at the sky. While looking at the azure sky, she quietly continued the conversation.

“My fiance was like you. He was a man whose only redeeming quality was his gentleness.”

“Your husband?”

Karuda made a suddenly sad face.

“No, he’s not my husband.”

She looked down, and at that moment something somewhere was sad in recollection as she whispered.

“Before he would become my husband, he died a noble death in battle...we were both 17 at the time.”

Kuze was at a loss for words. Perhaps seeing through his perplexed state, she said lightly.

“The reason I wear this military wear like mourning clothes is for that reason.”

And, suddenly, she made a serious face.

“So, we will not die. The honor of a knight is important, but also for your lover or wife, you must cling to life.”

Hearing this, Kuze made, without thinking, a bitter smile.

“What? Is there something odd?”

“Lovers, eh? Before going out to the sea, I got dumped. Said she didn’t want me to go, that if I’d go we’d be separated.”

An old wound...without meaning to, got dug into again. Karuda was taken

aback.

“...That woman threw you away for going to war?”

“Rather than war, we’re peacekeeping forces. I don’t think she took it seriously.”

“Still, she didn’t think that you were going to support your nation?”

“Who knows? She wanted to stop me, even by force, perhaps. But, truly, I don’t know where her heart was at.”

Hearing his answer, she was at a loss for words. There was something that she thought.

“...Oh yeah, I wonder what that was about.”

She made a face as though she regretted becoming serious.

“My fiance was like that too...”

She said this, and Kuze’s subordinates arrived. Upon seeing them, Karuda got up. And, as she left, she whispered in a small voice.

“If you live and make it back , with just that I will be glad...”

The painful whisper seemed to be sucked up by the wind. Kuze looked for an instant at her profile, and he could see the young girl in her. The thought of her at 17 years old suddenly popped into his mind. Her waiting near the window of a mansion, waiting for her fiance to return home, as a clean and pure lady. But, her fiance’s return never came.

Since then, it is like she wears mourning clothes. Among the nobles who wear much extra and gaunty decoration, she wears only black. And, to erase the pain of the war which stole her husband, she also chose to stand on the battlefield. It’s as if that woman who doesn’t show her emotions came to him to talk about them. Was it not to see the layers of similarity between her now dead fiance and his face? While Kuze was sending her small, thin back off, he thought all of this.

“A man whose only redeeming quality was his gentleness.”

When she said this, she was happy somewhere in her being. She probably

loved her fiance. I've...never lost someone I love. That may be a very good thing. (Counting getting dumped would be bad...yup.).

——And, it was that time.

“What? The sound of some sort of whistle?”

From the empire's side, a heavy noise that reverberated even into the inside of one's being came.; Bewildered, Kuze brought his face out of the barricade with his binoculars to see what was happening. In the middle of the enemy forces, the movement began. The decisive battle drew closer.

Part 5

Kuze's group was arranged throughout the barricade. The type 89 rifles were standing balanced on two legs, ready to shoot. In front of the gun points were the empire's army, crowded into a military position. It's still increasing, but at the present moment there are about a thousand enemies.

"Listen up! You Mariisua savages!"

A commander-looking man wearing a helmet adorned with plumage springs out in front of Kuze's group.

"We are the Filborg Inheritance Empire combined Southern Military, under shogun Rihyalda's command!"

The man seemed good at raising morale and inspiration on the battlefield when talking to the enemy. His voice resounded clearly and reverberated in the surroundings, with every single word and and phrase heard easily.

"If you capitulate to our camp, your clans will be wiped out as a mercy, these are the gracious words of Rihyalda-sama! Now, Hamieea, come stand here! If you scrape over here, your life alone will be salvaged!"

Kuze exchanged looks with Karuda, who had turned to the barricade, when he realized the approaching danger. She seemed to somehow want to leave this to Kuze. The ones who can withstand the empire forces are the SDF, so such a course of events would be natural, and when thinking of elsewhere in the country, Karuda felt that she already gave up much around the nation. Kuze stood up with a loudspeaker in hand.

"This is Japan's military dispatch, the Japanese Self-Defense Land Forces. So long as you are against these citizens and your continuing mass killings does not stop, you will not pass through. Again, if you go any further intending harm, we confirm that we will use force!"

(That guy..exactly what is he prattling on about?)

The commanding man, in front of their eyes, broke out into laughter. They're wearing weird clothes and are in a makeshift encampment made of furniture.

And, they're pointing stick-looking things at us. That encampment will likely get greatly lessened by just a charge from the cavalry.

But, the amount of soldiers like that is so small it won't be anything to write home about. At most, it's about 30 people. They intend to stop our advance? We're the Inheritance Empire Knight Unit. (Man, I almost feel pity for how insane these people seem...)

While the commander was thinking this, he slowly turned to face his subordinates, and raised his voice.

"Archers, get in position!"

About a hundred archers prepared to shoot, and aimed their arrows.

"Shoot!"

This is an attack to cause losses in the enemy forces prior to the direct confrontation. The confronting guys with the strange clothes turned tail against the arrows and hid in their encampment. Sure, the arrows feel like rain, but they didn't even reach the group in hiding.

(Heh, though that toy-looking encampment probably wouldn't be able to stop the attack anyway.)

That simple misshapen construction made out of wooden boxes which had arrows sticking out of was laughable. For those quivering in such a thing in the face of such an attack, fear isn't enough. After the arrows fell, they have their sticks pointed toward us like before.

If they mean to fight, they should leave their encampment and come here, with their swords or spears in hand, but that's not what is happening. The commander was sure of victory. The pitiful groups in front of his eyes were quivering in their encampment and were too scared to come out. He broadly grinned and laughed, and raised his voice.

"All troops, charge!"

He raised his big hand, and moved the momentum. The heavy infantry behind him raised their voices, reverberating on the ground. They were the voices of an epic war cry. And, they pointed their spears to the enemy encampment, and

systematically advanced forward.

But, the commanding man and the troops advancing forward didn't know what was in that laughable-looking encampment made of furniture. That is, they were unaware of the existence of the blind spot made by the soldiers from another world for this encampment, that which would be called the "Emergency Firearm Encampment."

Since earlier, counting the rear guard, there were something like a thousand people attacking in the enemy army. They met with the first wave of 200 people. Kuze gave his respective commands over the radio.

"Platoon, prepare to attack...!"

"Squad 1, prepare to attack!"

"Squad 2, prepare to attack!"

"Squad 3, prepare to attack!"

The members holding a type 89 5.56 mm rifle prepared to attack by releasing the safety and pointed their rifles to the troops which started advancing.

"Hurry and win!"

The enemy commander's voice compounded and reverberated with the war horn and the sound of the attack. The soldiers in black armor covering their bodies had well started their attack. Against such intensity, the SDF members with no experience in actual war cowered.

The distance between both sides shrunk. With 200 coming forward and needing to be cut down, Kuze issued an order.

"Fire!"

He nearly equaled the enemy commander's yelled order with his own. In response to his voice, the members pulled their triggers. With the gunshots came the sound of the empire's soldiers falling in spite of their somber armor hardening their bodies. That their armor is inefficient compared to the 5.56 mm high-speed rifle bullets which can go through kevlar is to be expected.

"Guagh!?"

“Ugh”

The courtyard was an open place with nowhere for someone to hide. To the SDF members, it was essentially just like a shooting range, making it an environment easy to aim in. The empire’s forces had no reason to know that rifles existed, so those in armor fell down rather swiftly. Without knowledge of them, they fell to the agency’s guns.

“What did they!? What happened!?”

The commander on the front lines for the empire’s forces didn’t at all understand what happened. After coming this far, all that should be left to do would be to capture the queen. But in this end game, “someone” was standing in his way.

It would probably be the Imperial Guard. But, for there to be soldiers that can defeat over a hundred elite knights in an instant shouldn’t be possible. It’s strange. They weren’t faced with anything particularly menacing. That’s all they understood.

“Arrows!! Arrows we can’t see are reigning down on us!”

“They’re using magic!”

Those were the words of those who saw their comrades fall, full of holes. Already, over half of them had become victims of the enemy’s attack.

“Get up the shields! There is no retreating for the Inheritance Empire’s military! Only advance forward!”

But the commander demanded resolute offensiveness. However, this was not just a show of valor. In the empire’s military, very often a commander who loses greatly will be decapitated, so he also commanded with this fear.

Even though he was told by Rihyalda that it would be OK even if they lose their camp here, such a one-sided battle followed by winning anyway would not be forgiven. In a battle where they don’t know at all what the enemy is thinking, what they needed to do to survive was simply to advance.

The SDF members on both sides immediately fired their MINIMI light machine guns balanced on two legs. The enemies were rained on by bullets that are shot

at a thousand per minute. In addition to the terrible noise of the gunshots, the screams of the enemy and their yells of death rose and mixed together, and the normally good-natured Kuze screamed.

“Don’t let the soldiers get any closer! Continue the barrage! Prepare the rifles!”

“Preparations complete!”

“Fire!”

They aimed toward the enemy who had arisen their shields, and fired the grenade bullets from their type 89 rifles. That is, the bullets for a type 06 rifle are called rifle grenades. By just attaching a warhead, you could shoot these grenade bullets via a rifle. The accuracy isn’t the best, but it can go much further than a hand grenade, and it is a cheap, heavy weapon used by normal soldiers in the land force.

Against the exploding grenade bullets, the shields will break, and their formation will be shattered. What is happening now in front of their eyes is a collision of the might of the SDF and the Inheritance Empire Military forces.

The other side clearly held the intent to kill toward this side. Kuze was able to see the difference between the approaching southern forces and them: it was a complete slaughter. The modern equipment didn’t just make them strong, they were only 32 people. To take the initiative they needed to completely beat down the enemy.

Again, it was expected that they would lose their will to fight and retreat upon seeing this side’s overpowering fire power. The other side shouldn’t know that there is a limit to the ammunition, so there is no need for their continued fighting in waiting for them to run out of ammunition. But, they missed his intentions.

“Shoot, those guys, making me stomped over my dead comrades!d-dead bodies!”

“I’m getting mad...!”

“Move the recoilless rifle forward!”

At Kuze's command, the one shouldering the 84 mm portable recoilless rifle decided to aim it at one unit of the heavy infantry. The loader following the shooter loaded the anti-tank high explosive projectile into the gun barrel, and made sure the breech mechanism was closed lightly.

And, to prepare for the backblast, he checked to make sure no allies were behind him. The loader gave the "ready to shoot" sign by lightly tapping the shooter on the helmet. The shooter pulled the trigger, and after the violent firing noise, together with the ear-splitting noise of the explosion, the enemy shields were altogether blown away. But, even with that, the enemy's march did not stop.

With hundreds of dead bodies rolling on the ground, the empire's forces raised their war cries even louder, raising their lances and swords and primitive weaponry to continue their attack against the barrage of bullets and an anti-tank missile. To the SDF members, their form couldn't seem like anything other than their being possessed by madness. They expected their vigor to be down at least somewhere, but it only seemed to increase.

"The Inheritance Emperor, Banzai!"

"Death not to the enemies of those who will inherit the world!"

It's been a few minutes since the start of the battle. To their resounding words, the enemy completely ignored their many fallen comrades in a reckless attack, and they continue to close the distance. It will be dangerous at this rate. Kuze, who thought this, gave Ichinose some new instructions.

"Ichinose, cover us from in the tower!"

Ichinose, who accepted the order, ran off toward the tower Kuze was pointing to.

"Trust me to guide you there."

Rarona, who left to run together with Ichinose, said this.

"Thank you."

Rarona, somewhere in his heart, gave Ichinose a little relief while being full of tension from the battlefield.

“Go!”

The two faced one of the castle’s four minarets. Ichinose truly felt like he was going to collapse from overworking his body since this morning. But, seeing Rarona, who was a girl younger than him, be so resolute meant he could not say such complaints. Run. Run.

On the way, they would meet the citizens-made-refugees. They all had the same look about them to Ichinose. And, this would pose to Rarona, who they knew to be a soldier, questions.

“How far has the enemy broken through?”

“What was that noise we heard earlier?”

Rarona, against her will, made a face of self-confidence and answered them.

“It is alright, since we are holding them back!”

Her words were full of a determination to do all that she possibly could. Ichinose realized that her “we” included him. Rarona was now recognizing him as a warrior. As they climbed the spiral stairs to the minaret, he realized he has never experienced anything so uplifting. He, someone so pitiable he was recognized as a soldier by someone, like Rarona. That made him happy.

“This is it! From here, you can see the whole courtyard!”

Rarona confirmed this by looking down out of the window of the highest stair of the minaret. In the courtyard continued the violent battle. In the sharp flash still left from the flash bombs, you could see enemies.

Sometimes, the sound of a grenade’s explosion would reverberated around. Thinking about the violent machine gun fire, it didn’t seem they would run out of ammo any time soon. The enemy commanding power needs to hurry and retreat already. Ichinose’s prepared his sniper rifle from the window. But, he didn’t know if the essential enemy commander was anywhere near.

“There! There is the subordinate holding the war flag, and next to him might be the knight corps leader, with the clothes with the plumage.”

While Ichinose was being impatient, Rarona spotted the one who looked to be the commander.

“You can see that well from up here?”

“It’s because I grew up as a mountain person!”

Mountain people are amazing, Ichinose whispered, as he found the target Rarona scouted out using the scope reticle. He took about 3 seconds, then pulled the trigger. The gunshot rang out, and the war flag 400 meters ahead of him fell. He shot the subordinate carrying it. Rarona made a face as though she were scared at her wits’ end. She wasn’t expecting one shot to kill.

“You hit him from this distance!?”

“For sure, I am a semi-special level sniper after all.”

Ichinose pulled the cocking handle—the handle on the back compartment of the gun—and ejected the empty shell and loaded the next bullet.

In the SDF, the level of snipers are divided into 5 groups: beginning level, middle level, upper level, semi-special level, and special level are the 5.

Among these, Ichinose is 2nd

from the top as a semi-special level sniper. He has the skill to shoot through the eye of a needle on a pitch-black night.

“Ichinose, where did you polish your skill to be so great?”

Rarona guessed that he must have trained under some famous, legendary archer. But, Ichinose gave a grin and answered.

“A game center on the way home from school!”

And, he aimed for the commander with the plumage outfit and shot. The parade sword turned around as the enemy commander, who had been yelling at his subordinates, writhed with his but on the ground. With this it is over is what Ichinose thought, but it didn’t go so well. The fallen enemy commanders’ subordinates were left to continue to hold up the flag again.

“Why did they picked up the flag?”

The target was killed easily enough , but they seemed to just get over it very easily.

“The flag is a symbol of the corps. The time for the flag to fall is when the

whole corps has been annihilated. The empire is especially like that.”

After hearing what Rarona’s words, Ichinose whispered, “I see.” And——
“Cheeky!”

Ichinose once again aimed for the soldier holding the flag. He took a little breath, suddenly stopped, and pressed the trigger. The backlash and the sound of the gunshot reverberated around the minaret.

The soldier holding the flag fell over on the ground from the shock. And, he gazed in amazement at the hand holding the flag. The flag staff broke as he shot it in the middle of the shaft.



“How’s that!”

Ichinose screamed as he held onto the cocking handle.

“Wow, that ‘Game Center’ really trained you well! Ichinose!”

With happiness, Rarona tapped Ichinose on the back, and he, without thinking, stared at her. With a smile, she seemed unreservedly happy. With gratitude, it would seem she thinks the game center is some sort of training grounds with archers or something.

...Well, that’s fine.

“Who’s next?!”

“Over there! The magic knight corps are preparing to use the attack magic!”

“Understood!”

Following Rarona’s instructions, Ichinose prepared the sniper rifle.

Part 6

“All soldiers, draw your swords!”

“Prepare to siege the castle!”

In front of Rihyalda eyes, the military unit surrounding the castle was arranged into a formation to siege the castle. The elite knight unit of the empire. In addition to that, high in the sky were two units of dragon knights waiting. Generally, it could be said that one dragon knight unit was equal to 10,000 soldiers. So, it could be said this side’s military might slightly exceeds that of 20,000 men. Thinking about it in terms of common sense, there’s no reason to think they would lose.

But——

“Report! Six commanding officers on the front line along with two unit leaders of the knights have died in battle! We have also lost our battle flag! The troops are in a terrible state!”

To Rihyalda’s common sense, this was a reversal to the war situation of having infiltrated the castle. She bore the pain of this information.

“Resume by having the lieutenant take command.”

“Th-that’s...the surviving commanders that want to take the battle flag all fall one by one to ‘invisible arrows’.”

“‘Invisible arrows’?”

She who took solace in the beginning reports of infiltrating the castle grew woeful. The sudden attack would soon be stopped at that inner citadel at this rate. She who drew closer to the camp near the castle could hear that dry

sound in her ears. From inside the castle, all that came from it was the beaten-up underlings.

The campaign's priestess with her healing magic might not make it in time for many of them. It was said they were taken out by "invisible arrows."

Those who approached were blown to smithereens by a fire-type magic by a group wearing strange clothes never seen before.

"I thought it was in like manner to that earlier black dragon of the fire dragon unit."

Rihyalda was a cautious leader. With such large bodies as dragons, if there is such magic capable of defeating the dragons, she figured to restrain them from the front lines. Again, since she didn't know the actual state of the mysterious enemies, the end result was that she invited disaster. She, as calmly as possible, returned back to her weak points in understanding the situation.

"...What exactly are these guys? Magic that defeats a black dragon in one hit, arrows we can't see, bugs that fly through the sky. I can't imagine this came from this world."

Her question was something no one there could answer. They said this war, with just this much firepower, would be over in half a day. And, Rihyalda held befitting self-confidence. In the empire's history, there were many times when such a thing became worthless in the heat of war.

"Hurry change the formation of the troops and gather the dragon knight troops."

"As you wish."

She gave her underlings this order. But, as she did this, an answer popped into her head.

"That Mariisua, could it be you made a contract with the devil king of hell?"

Rihyalda couldn't think of how Mariisua got such power by herself: It wasn't in by an omen or intelligence. That means some other force—in other words,

Mariisua has got some sort of special ally. It was a half-way there inference.

“The gate to hell was supposed to be sealed in the War of Inheritance.”

The voice of a man hurt her ears. There was a disturbing feeling that he had always been there.

“I know that. But then, what is it? Something is strange about this battle.”

“Hmm, I also do not know.”

“Then stand down!”

An enraged Rihyalda scowled at Genful. It was that time ...

A yell came from an underling.

“Sho-shogun!?”

“What is it?!”

Turning around Rihyalda looks into all of her subordinates that were looking in the direction of the sea. It was just a blank stare. Even the injured soldiers did the same. In the direction of that sea, ocean that died red by the city burning in the flames. There, “something” was floating.

“What...is that...?”

It was something no one in this world had seen before. It was something that did not come from this world, a battleship of a nation called Japan, something beyond their understanding. But, that it was something for them to fight was understood and taught by Rihyalda, as the red of the city in flames wavered on its hull.

“Hu...I see, they called for help.”

Rihyalda guessed on a hunch. That thing—whether it be some mysterious

house or grotesque mercenaries, either way is fine. The military rule observed by the soldiers of the empire to push through had one thing needed right now to be able to see through. Was the thing in front of their eyes friend or foe or something else: Given the current situation, it would be decided the grotesque ship is probably an enemy.

“Are we already finished with the gathered of the dragon knights?”

She asked the old general on her side.

“Yes! We have finished gathered the black dragon knights unit and the ice and snow knights unit!”

“Change of plans. Use all the dragon knight units we have and sink that ship.”

“Bu-but...”

“It would be dangerous for them to get even more manpower. Finish it at once!”

She made a declaration, and a horn was blown to indicate the change of attack plan for the black knight unit.

The dragon knight units on standby were waiting for such a signal, and quickly responded.

“Departure for the front-!”

“Hold the unit flag!”

They got excited at the sound of the horn they heard over the resting dozens of dragons resting their wings. The ferocious yell of the dragons made the earthquake. The sublime dragons were visibly glad to seek out the enemy and they

flapped their wings. The battle across space-time had started.

Part 7

The Aegis class Destroyer “Ibuki” raised its speed. As it moved away from the fleet and drew closer to the Imperial Capital Seiroad. This was for the purpose of protecting the ground forces already in a painful battle. Essentially, the Aegis destroyer’s greatest advantage was the ability to be out of range of all the enemies’ attacks, yet still be able to attack them with missiles, that was the ability to out-range the enemy.

It shouldn’t have been necessary to move close enough to see the city with the naked eye. However, Kaburagi ventured to go so close. Historically, the marines have wanted to see nearby nations from aboard the vessel fairly often.

This time, it isn’t fully dedicated for planning the tactics, . At the same time, it could raise the possibility of putting themselves in danger, but having the land force members in danger was something that the main force commander would not accept. Kaburagi was deep in the ship in the CIC. (*CIC :

Combat Information Center / under the British system AIC (Action Information Centre))

Without windows, the dimly lit room was filled with operations specialists glaring at the radar screen so as to not overlook even the smallest mistake.

“Carefully watch out for any aircraft.”

Kaburagi instructed, and they replied greatly.

“Roger. We will carefully watch for any aircraft.”

Kaburagi stared at the radar screen when, all at once, the luminous points increased. He quickly understood that it was the “enemy” flying.

“Commander Kaburagi, it is confirmed to be aircraft from an unknown nation!, enemy targets are about 50 aircraft!”

“...It’s not the aircraft, it was an animals.”

Kaburagi made a cynical face...was what happened. Though there was ample time so the subordinates to be able to rest assured, many were still stiff with the tension of the situation. But, that couldn’t be helped. Yes, this was the first “real war” for the SDF.

“The targets are heading straight to this ship, and are getting closer! The closest target is about 6 miles away!”

“Commander, please relay to us your instructions!”

The weapons officer that controls the use of weapons asked Kaburagi for instructions. For the Aegis Destroyer’s full range of battle distance, they were relatively close. There was not even a hesitation. Kaburagi commanded the weapons officer.

“Prepare for an anti-aircraft battle!”

The weapons officer yelled to the subordinates.

“Pre~pare for an air~craft ba~ttle!”

It is tradition from the era of the old Japanese marine military to give commands to start battle preparations with a weird pronunciation in the CIC. It is a behavior deeply engraved in the person which one gets used to through practice. Concurrently, the arrangement order alarm rang throughout, and reverberated throughout the warship.

Those riding on the warship were at their posts and put on their helmets and Kapok life jackets. And, every door, and wall hatches were all closed. These were the measures for the chance that the ship would take damage and some flooding would occur, there would be a sort of block to keep the flooding to a minimum. Kaburagi did just as the training went, and rapidly readied the positions for battle. His subordinates did their best. So, as the commander, he also must do his best.

“Watch our battle power. We’ll do the attack on half auto mode. With the loss of the enemy target group’s battle power as an objective, intercept. Shoot down all the enemies coming our way!”

The crew was astir. The head of the weapons officers, without thinking about the normally good-natured Kaburagi’s words, the orders to attack, which could be called excessive, reached his ears.

“The enemy is serious. If we aren’t serious as well, there will be no meaning to it.”

Kaburagi said, as though to persuade. Thinking about the enemy’s true purpose in his head, in conjunction with what is known as far as Katou’s report goes, the light-hearted battle became dangerous, one could think. Looking at the earlier radar screen, one could see all the enemy’s flying battle power heading their way.

In other words, the enemy’s commander was trying to sink the crew with all of its power. It was hard to think halfway-there that the has occurred. This was a battlefield, and the enemy is calmly invading a foreign nation, going as far as to massacre in doing such; this is a real military troop.

Secretly, Kaburagi fell to self-derision. Against such a real military troop, how far would a “peaceful military” troop go?

“Commander Kaburagi...we have finished the preparation. We can beat down all the approaching ‘flying enemies’!”

The weapons officer confirmed that Kaburagi was not unsure of his orders, as Kaburagi made an expression of decided resolution and ordered his subordinates.

“Main armament and short-range missiles, stand by!”

At the same time, the Aegis system’s computer with the ability to detect, capture, and intercept over 200 targets started to calculate the coming enemies’ distances and speed to determine their threat levels and see which took priority.

Note:

This is what an ESSM ROCKET BOOSTER looks like in real life.



Part 8

In the sky, the ice and snow knight unit's elite 26 knights and the Black dragon unit's 24 knights were gathered in a formation. The form of 50 knights and dragons dancing in the sky is simply magnificent. Usually, seeing such a dignified thing would result in the enemy raising their white flag of surrender, probably.

Yes, usually.

Elvira of the dragon knights from the snow and ice knights unit observed the ships of unknown nationality floating in the inlet of Seiroad anew.

It has the shape of a boat, but maybe that is not the best description. If there is no mast or a sail, perhaps it is not a boat. But, regardless, it continued faster than the wind.

"That ship, it's huge..."

From her common sense, the first impression from it would be more like an island of rock over a boat. She had seen the empire's military warships, but this is several times larger than those.

"Elvira, could it be that ship is made of iron?"

Her comrade in arms Arnold, who had a face like a bear, had an expression of being excited from telling jokes. He is a noble from the northern parts of the empire, but upon seeing him, he'd look like a drunken bandit. Since he's always telling jokes, even on the battlefield, the upper commanders are always upset with him. With such a man, Elvira had to continue an undesirable but inseparable relation.

"This is the first time I've heard of iron floating on water."

"I know. But why would it be that color? Even if you could make a boat of iron, how did they get it to float on water...?"

The boat had the color of dried ash. In the Inheritance Empire's marine force, to instill fear into their enemies, they have painted their vessels black and red, but it was unheard of to paint them gray. The shape of the boat looked like kids made a toy with building blocks and structured it like a square.

—But, to them, the ideas of stealth or camouflage at sea in a missile battle should be new. A ship to them wasn't something that fundamentally had to hide itself in a threatening battle.

"How stupid. It's just paper mache. When we get to it and attack at full power, it won't stand a chance."

Elvira answered with a cool composure. That such a large ship would float and move without a sail is certainly surprising. But, if it really were an iron ship, moving that fast would be an impossibility. Probably, most of the ship is just paper mache and its appearance is just a bluff. These warriors have self-confidence and pride.

They could be called the strongest dragon knights in the world. A black dragon getting injured isn't that rare, and, it's not like there haven't been tough battles where a dragon or two were lost throughout history.

And, with just these numbers of knight troops gathered, there are no losses. Because of these things, you could see on their faces that they felt they had time to spare.

"Ah! That's true, too. But, look, on the ground they have as allies the Mariisua people, and we're being focused to one spot."

Elvira turned around and verified this. To be sure, on land they are reaching a sort of stalemate. And everyone looked up to these dragon knight units as gallant figures. There were no bad feelings about what is happening.

Though it is disappointing, the enemy is just a single paper mache boat, but Shogun Rihyalda using the dragon knight units like this is brilliant. After the paper mache boat goes to its watery grave, the opposing general will feel fully dejected. Elvira combed her hair, which was the color of snow as a characteristic of northern females, upwards.

"This much of a collection of dragon knights is rare for anyone. If I was on the

ground, I'd be a sight-seer."

We're not passing over very many onlookers. Oh, the unit leader has said it looks like we're cutting off the vanguard."

To have the commander raid was a tradition in the empire's dragon knights and it was a grace on the battlefield. The unit leader of the ice and snow knight unit could boast as a military veteran of having destroyed over 10 nations.

When he was younger, he lost one eye in battle, and though he has an eye patch now, it gives him the appearance of being an experienced warrior. His subordinates trusted in him greatly; of all the battles he has ever been in, he has not lost once, or so they say.

"Follow after me! The empire's elites!"

"To the Inheritance Emperor, banzai!"

The four knights of the commander class in the snow and ice knight unit at once raised their speed to thrust at the enemy. The commanders of the black dragon knights also continued after them and nose dived.

The "Ibuki" CIC detected the state of the enemy not with the naked eye, but with phased array radar.

"Target groups, bravo, closest to the ship! Its bearing is 320 degrees! Reporting on the counterattack priority!"

The operations specialist observing the radar screen raised his voice. It's finally come.

Kaburagi took a big breath. And, he resolved himself and ordered. After coming this far, he cannot hold back any further.

“Roger...I give permission to counterattack!”

Those short words have been the foundation of the SDF for over half a century, yet he was at once giving taboo orders. These orders to attack...if they weren't given, it wouldn't be carried out. But, at once, the ship obeyed. The Aegis destroyer, the “Ibuki”, was made for nothing else but battle, after all.

“Left-aircraft battle, CIC instructions targets, begin firing the main armament!”

“Beginning to shoot!”

The firing squad members holding onto the pistol-like firing equipment prepared the console near there, and pulled the trigger. And, the already-stocked 127 mm rapid-fire cannon on the bow's gun turret was rapidly fired, and the cannonballs were automatically stocked. It pointed to the targets and fired——

The flash from the fired weapon was seen by Elvira.

“They have quite the artillery...”

There was no sound. From where she was looking, there was only one cannon. Before, there was this time that over 10 pirate ships fired their cannons at the same time at them. However, the shots didn't hit. Cannons were not something to aim up at the sky. Further, this time, the distance is too great to be hit by the cannonball. It's much too far away. It at least wouldn't reach the unit leader of the snow and ice unit, which was charging at them.

“The enemy is also desperate.”

They didn't fear the enemy here, and it appeared the cannon was too far to hit them after all. That was what Elvira decided. However, that was a mistake.

The cannonball reached the tip of the nose of the dragon the snow and ice

knight unit's unit leader was riding. And, before it touched it, the cannonball exploded. The terrifying shock wave blew off the dragon's neck, and the flames caught the unit leader of the knights' whole body on fire.

"A....e...?!"

Elvira could not believe what just occurred in front her very eyes. The dragon, completely covered in flames, fell down. And, as the blast smoke rose up, the dragon fell to the water, and a giant shot of water spray rose up.

"Unit leader!"

Elvira and company were in terror as they saw the superior officer they loved as a father lose his life. However, immediately, the next commissioned officer to take the forces' flag took hold of it and came out so as to raise morale. The speed of this change in position showed that they truly were elites.

"You scum! You will pay for injuring us, the dragon knight unit, with your worthless lives——"

As though to interrupt these words, the commissioned officer's dragon became engulfed in flames. Upon looking, it is clear the ship is again bombarding them with their cannon fire.

(No way!? How can their cannon fire their next cannonball so fast!?)

To fire a cannon, multiple people have to insert gunpowder into the mouth of the cannon and insert the cannonball. To fire their next cannonball in just those few seconds, some method outside of this ordinary one must have been used. Further, after a few seconds, the enemy cannon once again emitted fire. Finding no answer in the surprise, this time, her direct upper commander was the one caught and fired and forced to fall into the sea.

"That was just a lucky shot!"

Arnold's expression changed. Clearly, they were being "targeted."

While they were being surprised, the ship's cannon once again moved to

again bombard them. To that, the comrades shook off their shock.

“Shoot! That’s not a human technique!”

Up until now, the dragon knights always fought their enemies. However, this was the first time they fought an enemy that was beyond their understanding.

“There’s only one cannon! From where they are, they shouldn’t be able to reach us with their attacks!”

In this situation, Elvira did not lose her ability to make a calm decision. The dragon knights had not been to so many battlefields for show. Arnold also nodded.

“It’s like that, eh; let’s deploy!”

The enemy’s movements showed a high level of cooperation. However, the Aegis destroyer’s equipment like the 3 dimensional radar allowed one to see the individual movements of many dozens of dragons by detecting and acquiring each target. The computer that controls the firearms marked and targets the approaching targets for attack. And, in the shortest time, like it was already done, the priority targets were attacked.

This flow of action was completely automated. The 127 mm rapid fire gun and from the alignment came the firing, with the loading of the next cannon all done automatically. Because of this, the firing timing is much faster than a human’s, with no time wasted on mistakes or taking anything apart or on hesitation. In addition, the small transmission device for the VT fuse that was used for the anti-air cannonballs was being prepared.

The electric signals sent out from the transmissions, in the moment they hit the target in detection and returned back, holds the possibility of being explosive. In other words, it is not necessary for the anti-air cannonballs to hit.

“...They are a fairly calm enemy unit.”

When Kaburagi put himself in the position to fight these unknown enemies, he himself was unsure if they could fight calmly. As a military man, even looking

up at the radar screen showing his enemies, he remembered to respect them. At the same time, he honestly felt that if he were to let his guard down, they would take his head. That's why he gave orders for the survival of his comrades.

"Aim the ESSM through the main armament to the enemies at the correspondence range!"

The order to use the Aegis warship's main anti-air missile weapon is accepted, screamed the weapons officer.

"Send out the VLS!" (TL note: the VLS is a type of missile)

The firing squad members answered immediately.

"The illuminator links!"

The quad which had accepted these words wondered which enemy and in what order to shoot them down. The ESSM the Aegis warship is using was able to detect and follow the targets with the semi-active radar homing.

This is weaponry that allows for the detection of enemies for the warhead missile after receiving them from bouncing off the enemies after the initial release of the radar waves.

If it could be acquired via radar, for instance, if it were a "dragon," attacking it would then be possible.

After the data of the targets was finished being input, the firing squad control members yelled.

"Sea sparrow ready to fire!"

"Recommend fire!"

The weapons officer raised his voice.

"Salvo!"

According to the plan to launch the missile, the hatches of the VLS cells on the

decks of the bow and stern were opened. And, inside the cell, was the hangar where the anti-air missile on the warship, the ESSM's rocket booster was put to work. (*ESSM:

Evolved Sea Sparrow Missile) (*VLS:vertical launching system)

“What is that!?It exploded by itself?!”

Elvira opened her eyes wide. Not a single attack has landed from this side. Not a single dragon rider has reached the boat yet.

—The sight of the VLS missiles shot out all at once looked like the warship was surrounded by flame. But, this was because the flames rising from the the missiles' boosters was all around the vessel.

Elvira saw something fly from the middle the this sight.

“Shining, a lance?!”

There were many of the things in the sky, with white tails of smoke, coming straight at her and her comrades.

Her instincts pulled her. To run, that is.

“Ha~!?”

In an instant, Elvira pulled on the reigns, but the dragon didn't move. Something crossed the way before her eyes.

“Wh-what is that...waagh!?”

A moment before Arnold screamed, an explosion occurred right by the woman. Along with the blast, a sharp flake scraped her cheek. Arnold became a sacrifice. Elvira understood only that. She regained her balance, and like a small bug in the heat of the summer by a torch's flames, she could see her crew mate's dragon fall in pieces.

There was the scream of the dragon in death's agony. Elvira couldn't believe

that what occurred before her eyes was reality. Had such damage until now ever been afflicted to the dragon knight unit?

“It can’t be...this can’t be...”

Elvira was in fear.

The dragon knights are supposed to be absolutely peerless in strength in this world. The empire had flourished to this point largely because of the dragon knights. Yet these dragon knights were thrown away in death like the leaves of a tree against this might.

The cannon fire continued coming with remorse, and the same number of crew members as there were fires fell to the sea. The lances of light followed the dragons running away as if it had a mind of its own; it followed on the same path and then exploded. Yes, this is a nightmare. There’s no mistake. This is a bad dream given by some demon.

“Ah...ahh...”

But, she came back to her senses. Would she be just a spectator to this bad dream, or would she act? She turned around. She wouldn’t act like this bad dream affected only her.

Part 9

In the CIC, each one in charge's information came out one after the other.

"Forty one enemies confirmed down!"

"They've started taking distance from the vessel and the targets."

Kaburagi could sense the conclusion of the battle due to the operations specialists' intelligence. After the missile attack in which the enemy lost over ten members, this became a very one-sided battle after sending the remaining members into confusion. There was not a single dragon approaching. The flying squad completely was defeated in morale and in actual battle power, and they started to get away from the vessel.

"Stop attacking at once, and switch to manual mode. But don't let your guard down."

"Roger."

"Hurry in cooling the overheated barrels and in replenishing the ammo."

"Yes!"

Like in the practice, after the orders stopped, there came a stillness among the CIC members. The squad members looked at each other.

The barrel cooled, the coolant was applied and the ammo has been resupplied, and the enemies were hit by a rain of missiles. However, CIC knew what was important and was waiting on the lit that blips on the radar screen to disappear. That is a high-tech battle. They know there are people being hurt and killed in these situations. But, their true feelings were just a sense of wonderment.

"...It's as if it was just a maneuver."

One member said this alone. Those were words which described the feelings of everyone who was there.

"It was no maneuver. Definitely, so let us not forget that."

Kaburagi said this himself, as if the man was speaking to him.

And, the weapons officer just stood there, and quietly put his hand on the radar screen.

Chapter 5: The Eye of the Shooting Star

Part 1

The battlefield returned to its stormy calm. There was not a single soldier who broke away.

“You... You...”

Rihyalda somehow opened her mouth despite her shaking lips.

“Monsters...!”

While the dragon knights were taking on a wave of attacks, Rihyalda didn't have a single scratch on her as she quietly looked at the bodies that were floating in the sea; she could not muster any other words aside from these. Around those bodies was the smoke of the burnt black dragons rising up as their bodies drifted between the waves.

With the dragon knights now annihilated, there is no mistaking that the plan to capture Mariisua is now a complete failure. The large number of giant birds used for transportation had been evacuated after they finished transportation, so that they didn't interfere with the fight.

The invasion of the mixed southern military forces had become completely helpless. They had no way to contact their original nations of this fact, and even the shogun's wishes of a retreat did not come true. The plan was to capture them after victory, but that completely backfired.

Before her eyes was an unbelievable defeat, and with the knowledge of having such an impossible enemy, the soldiers and officers morale were at a new low.

“Sh... Shogun... Uh... Just what kind of enemy are we fighting against!?”

“They treated the dragon knight unit like they were children and sent them to their watery graves...-Just what are these guys!?”

The staff officers were in a state of confusion, and asking her questions as if to find some strand of sense in all this. They knew that Rihyalda didn't hold an answer for a question like that. But, their hearts were too shocked by the fact that the dragon knight unit was annihilated.

"... I will not forgive this."

"What?"

Rihyalda scowled at the castle gate before her eyes. Half of the castle was supposed to have fallen into her hands by now. They should have been close to taking Queen Hamieea's head. The hopes of retreat was cast far from them.

Against such a mysterious enemy, their chances of victory became naught. For a warrior, falling in battle is their last pride. For instance, if in the end they could still destroy Mariisua, then their deaths would hold meaning. Rihyalda took out the sword on her waist. This sword had been passed down for generations in her family; it is sealed with magical power: it is a magic sword.

"Ancestors... Please guide us."

She closed her eyes like a saint. Then, she lifted her sword riotously and declared.

"All soldiers, follow me! We aim for the Hamieea's head!"

Even in this despondent situation, Rihyalda held onto unfading charisma. Her subordinates riled up at the sound of her voice. The morale of the troops which was at the verge of breakdown, just her voice brought it back up.

"F-follow the shogun!"

"There is no retreat for us Inheritance Empire forces!"

Rihyalda commanded the mass of surviving soldiers and started a march towards the inside of the castle.

But, in this march there wasn't a sliver of hope to be seen. That was the end result of the battle that they were supposedly set up to win just a few dozen minutes earlier.

Part 2

“Hurry, get the casualties on board!”

Kuze yelled as he confirmed the landing of the 1

CH-47JA giant transport model helicopter, which holds 2 giant rotors, in the courtyard during the violent down wash. The battle power of the empire’s forces was greatly abated by the power of the Aegis warship.

Around the area where the scattered remains of the empire soldiers who were hit by bullets. It looked like Platoon Leader Kuze was about to run out of ammunition, but they were able to have just enough to secure the courtyard. Hearing Kuze, the warriors of Mariisua carried the severely wounded on stretchers.

“Hurry! Lives are depending on this!”

Those frightened by the explosive noise of the helicopter were reprimanded by Karuda.

“Big sister!”

“Eve...ry...one...”

In the middle of carrying all of the casualties on board, Kuze noticed the young maid. It seemed her consciousness was still hazy, but she was somehow still holding onto life. Ryumi’s healing magic might have made it in time. In the middle of all the tension, this helped relieve it a little.

“It is fine. The gods will never abandon someone who doesn’t give up.”

Even though Ryumi was clearly tired from singing an aria for so long for the healing magic’s purposes, she lightly pat the children’s’ heads with a gentle expression.

“That’s it for now! We’re done replenishing ammo and accommodating the injured! For everyone else, please wait a little longer!”

The crew yelled to Kuze, and so the back door they used to carry people in was closed. Those who were really injured on the helicopter would be brought to the transport vessel with a plan for them to get a surgical operation.

“Please! Hurry and get them there!”

They did not want a single person there to die, and Kuze especially desired this. They raised the output of the large helicopter, and started flying off as the violent winds were created by the turning of the rotors. He had one anxiety that bothered him about being left alone as he saw the helicopter fly off.

It was at that time.

“You monsters! Prepare yourselves!”

Arising from around the corpses of his allies, a soldier of the empire arose, broadsword in hand; he moved to attack Kuze. Kuze moved to get out his handgun, but because of the sudden surprise of the attack, his movements were too slow.

“Ugh!?”

He opened his eyes wide, regretting his moment of carelessness.

“They’ve got me”

, he thought. But, faster than the blink of an eye, the soldier had a lance pierced through his chest.

“Guagh!?”

The empire’s soldier fell dead at that very spot. Kuze remembered that lance. A splendid adornment came out: it was a red jewel-like thing which was at the point of the blade that dug into the foe. And, it seemed quite heavy. It was Karuda’s special weapon. Karuda gave Kuze a keen scowl while pulling her lance out of the enemy.

“Don’t let your guard down on the battlefield! Your death and the death of this soldier will come just the same!”

“S-sorry...”

He had no other words to respond with. His own carelessness was to blame for the incident just now. Karuda saved his life. To her, Kuze could only make an apologetic face. Seeing this, Karuda smiled abruptly.

“Don’t die! You, who came from a parallel world... You, who was originally not supposed to be involved with this world; we can’t let you die here!”

Thoughtlessly, Kuze stared at Karuda's face. It had a gentle expression.

Somehow, in that state, he ended up following her. Kuze prepared his gun and returned back to the barricade cautiously as he said to Karuda.

"Will you let me say something a bit self-centric?"

"Eh?"

They entered the barricade and squatted. Karuda too bent down and waited. Kuze, while checking the ammo, continued the conversation.

"It's not like I'm not involved in this country, Karuda-san. It's only been a short while, but I've met you and that young maid girl and Ryumi. Even if Japan's leader of the SDF told me that I can't have these feelings because this is the wrong world and that you live in the wrong country, I think I'd still want to protect you."

"Kuze...dono..."

To Kuze's words, Karuda took in a large breath.

"I think I want to protect you, Karuda."

In her mind, memories of the past showed themselves. The memory of the last time she met her fiance. It didn't excel his passion for the military, but he loved literature. He taught Karuda about the history, literature and the beauty of her territory.

He was very erudite. And, without the vanity of being a noble, he was frank with the people of the estate with gentility. Considering that man, she couldn't give out a comparable emotion.

He was from a small noble family around her, but he was the fiance from a fine family. Even though the families seemed to be dealing coldly with each other, Karuda was happy with that. Though it was supposed to be a marriage of political convenience, she was happy with him being her fiance. She liked his sincerity.

She never said it but she was not dissatisfied. But, the last time they met. It was when a skirmish broke out at the border with the neighboring nation, and there was a draft for soldiers, to which he responded. He said it. That "I want to

protect you.” Now, before her eyes, there is a young man named Kuze from a parallel world saying the same thing. Not to be brave or as his duty for being a noble. Just, “I want to protect.”

“It’s alright; thankfully it looks like I’m in luck to be protected by Karuda-san like that.”

“Eh...”

Thanks to Kuze’s words, Karuda was able to return to reality. And, she stared at his smile.

“I won’t die. I have no intentions of dying.”

She realized that tears were about to flow and she quickly averted her face away from him. Gentle as anybody else. Beyond herself, someone else’s happiness took precedence.

Over myself, I will put this body on the line to protect someone else.

The face, the race, and the clothes are all different. Yet, he resembles him.

“What’s wrong?”

“Oh, sorry, some rubbish from when that thing you guys ride on got stirred up and got in my eye...”

It was a transparent lie. But, Kuze took it super seriously.

“That’s bad, man. To guard against scattered, small things, normally you’d put on goggles... Let me see your eyes for a bit.”

He raised his hip up a bit and peered into Karuda’s face. Concerning stuff like this, it might be because of Kuze’s inability to subtly read the mood that his ex-girlfriend broke up with him.

“Kya...!”

Karuda, who didn’t want Kuze to see her crying face, let out a short scream and shook her hand loose from his. Kuze was also shocked that a commander on the battlefield, who shouldn’t get perturbed easily, would let out a scream like a little girl.

“Wa-!? Ah, s-sorry!”

Not understanding what happened at all, Kuze apologized on reflex.

“N-no, actually it was my bad. It is fine now. No problem.”

Karuda grabbed her lance in her hand, and got up as if to run from the barricade.

“Please wait a little.”

“No, no, like I said, it’s fine now!”

“No, not that!”

Kuze stood up with an ear to the wireless communication device. It was a message from the sharp shooter who had climbed onto the minaret, Ichinose.

“Second Lieutenant Kuze! There are signs of the enemies from the front! A large crowd of foot soldiers are on their way here!”

With binoculars in hand, Kuze stepped out of the barricade.

“... The enemy’s objective, eh?”

Karuda whispered next to him.

1This is the image of a CH-47JA
Fullname: Boeing CH-47 Chinook



Part 3

Rihyalda thought that it was pretty quiet. Here, at the foremost line of the battlefield, was the first time she felt such silence. However, there were many corpses of her allies strewn on the ground in the courtyard.

She could also see the defeated dragon, along with things that looked like wreckage. In the interior was a heap of furniture, probably to defend against arrows, making up a shoddy-looking camp. A person was in there.

This person was the one blocking the Empire’s forces, standing in front of them. The one with the power to destroy in an instant what could be called without exaggeration the strongest force in this world – the dragon knight unit – was standing there.

At this point of time, their fate probably wouldn’t change. But the forces wanted to be satisfied at the end. Whether it be a military man or a knight, the honor of knowing that your true self belonged to the one who kills you – that was the desire and duty of one who kills.

“Wait here.”

“Shogun?”

“It’s dangerous!”

Ignoring calls for restraint from her subordinates, Rihyalda continued walking forward. While she walked, she thought.

Just what exactly is the enemy? There’s no mistake that they are not part of Mariisua’s military. That’s confirmed.

Up until now, the Mariisua they had been fighting against had been tenacious, but they could not rival the empire. There was a battleship in the bay near Sei road that fought like a fierce god.

Did they ride here on that? Just where are they from? Far away, like the end of the four continents? Though this is stopped under the Inheritance Empire’s military rule, are they a volunteer military? I don’t understand.

Not a single thought came up which was not a speculation.

“Please stop.”

The one from whom the voice came out was across from her, coming to close the distance to where soon she could see his face. Rihyalda, without being the least bit agitated, raised her voice in a noble manner.

“My name is Rihyalda! I have been honored to hold the position of the fourth level shogun as the supreme commander of the Monarch’s southern mixed troops of the Filborg Inheritance Empire! I request to meet your general!”

The person, probably a Mariisua warrior, could hear the shakiness in her voice.

It wasn’t these guys. There’s no way the strongest unit would lose to these guys.

And, from the unsightly camp made of piled up furniture stepped out one man.

“I am Japan’s Ground Self-Defense Force Second Lieutenant Kuze. I am the commander of this base.”

He said, and he walked toward where Rihyalda was. It was a young, strange

man. He was wrapped fully in strange clothes with a green, brown, and black spotted pattern. But, upon closer inspection, it seemed to be some sort of armor. He also seemed to be carrying a knife at his waist.

She understood that his armament was made to be very efficient. She observed the unsightly camp, and understood that there were about 30 others in the same outfit as him.

Who are they? Rihyalda was flabbergasted.

The man in front of her eyes was probably younger than her. He had refined movements, and he put out his hand ahead of his forehead. She didn't understand what he was trying to do in that moment, but she understood that it was a sign of respect. She compassionately nodded. He had no desire to recede from the silver-haired female shogun.

"... It doesn't seem like you're the general of the whole party... Are you?"

"I am the commander of this spot. The ultimate commander is in that vessel, and so I am sorry that I cannot presently bring you two together."

"I see."

Rihyalda said calmly. Even if he was the supreme commander, she had no intention of getting agitated with him.

"So you are on an expedition from the country named Japan, correct?"

"Yes... Though there was no intention of coming here."

"Hm. That is odd of you to say. But, I have not heard of this country. On what continent is this country to be found?"

"It is a country which does not exist in this world."

"What?"

At that time, Rihyalda showed her first signs of shock.

"We have come here from a parallel world... The Self-Defense Force is the name of an armed military group."

"A parallel world... You say?"

She thought that the group Mariisua had obtained as its ally was some sort of

mercenary volunteer army. However, despite the numerous battlefields she had fought on, she could not understand their nationality. They were wrapped in never-before-seen clothes and held strange weapons.

She couldn't understand. If these were foreigners from another world, there's no way she could correctly guess about them. To the shocked woman, the man said.

"Frankly, I'm going to ask you to do something."

"...What is it, Kuze-dono?"

"Please retreat."

"...The bird I rode on to get here has already returned to the opposite shore. We came here to win, after all."

"Then, please surrender and submit to the Mariisua military."

Rihyalda laughed at this rather inappropriate time. The town is in flames, the countrymen were massively killed, and these Mariisua people are going to ask them to become prisoners of war? They brought their weapons to ultimately kill them by decapitation or by hanging. Or to have them become slaves after much torture if not just killed.

"If you are not joking, you are quite the hypocrite."

"According to the Geneva Convention... We will secure your lives, and to that end, we will mediate between the two nations."

"I refuse. We are a military people, and to that end, we live on the battlefield and die on the battlefield. We have brought our weapons; to die anywhere except the battlefield would be a disgrace."

"Then, why did you come to meet me?"

"What?"

The man asked in silence to the young shogun of the empire's forces.

"... Did you not think of wanting to save your subordinates?"

"First, let me say:"

Rihyalda seethed with anger like a carnivorous beast, and with a glint in her

eye faced him.

“With such worthless, virgin words, I definitely cannot accept that our officers and soldiers would lose to the likes of you!”

She pulled out the magic sword from her waist.

Kuze got the rifle that was on his shoulders into his hands. But, he could not shoot it. At point-blank range against a real, flesh-and-blood human, he hesitated to shoot.

Kuze fully realized the meaning of her words when she called him a “hypocrite.” Even though she is before him with criminal intent, he can’t shoot the young lady. Even if he could shoot those empire soldiers trying to kill the children, he could not bring himself to shoot the beautiful female shogun.

But, hesitating to kill or injure someone on the battlefield at point-blank range is not rare in reality. Without all of the conditions present in such an imminent situation, one cannot shoot another person. The current Kuze let his guilt overcome his defensive instinct.

“Scream out, my blade! I entrust this to your all-consuming flames!”

Flames clad Rihyalda’s sword. It was the magic sword Balmanx. The spirit of the sublimely brutal flames were sealed in a blue jewel implanted in the blade of the sword. Rihyalda’s ancestor, Count Gunther, is held in high esteem as a hero, even in the empire, for protecting the eastern border at the Mars fort with just a hundred soldiers.

The Balmanx was the weapon he used. It was said that the creator found it when he was an adventurer inside the maze of Saalal. Even if you kill with magic, even if you fight the undead and vengeful spirits as your allies, this sword will not lose.

“The only place for a military soldier to die is on the battlefield! Take this, knight from another world!”

She challenged him to one-on-one combat. She expected to fight with honor by crossing swords with a knight. But, in the next moment, she felt something pierce her body.

“Eh...?”

Suddenly, with a jerk, she lost the power in her body. After a slight delay, she heard a dry sound in her ears. When she looked at her own chest, there was a hole in her armor. She thought back.

“Invisible arrows”

: was the report of what caused commanders one after the other to fall.

“Guagh!?”

The moment she realized he got her, she spit out blood and fell right at that spot.

Kuze looked over her and was dumbfounded with his still-prepared gun.

“Se-second Lieutenant Kuze, I-I...”

Ichinose, who had been watching over the situation from the minaret, had his quivering voice come over on the wireless communication device. Kuze was taken aback. Ichinose had fulfilled his duty as a sniper in the SDF, which is to “protect the allied commander.”

He also hesitated, like Kuze, to shoot Rihyalda, whom he saw from his scope. Kuze thought back to Katou. The upper commander entrusted him to either have the courage to shoot or to choose the path of fleeing. Kuze faced the wireless communication device and spoke in the only expression he could.

“Ichinose! Thanks for saving me!”

“Eh..?”

“Sorry, it was because of my usual habit of having the safety on. If you didn’t shoot, I would be dead.”

He said this, and, even if just a little, it relieved some of the young private Ichinose’s guilt. Ichinose, on the other side of the communication, didn’t give any sign as to whether he was celebratory or in agony over it like usual, as he stayed silent at first.

“Are you alright?! Kuze-dono!”

Kuze understood that Karuda was coming from behind him. Kuze turned

around, and she was relieved to see he wasn't hurt.

—And.

"Fu... Fu..."

Lying face-up on the ground, looking at the sky while near-death, Rihyalda flatly laughed. Karuda squinted her eyes and walked over to where she was.

"What's so funny, invader?"

"This unsightly death... Is..."

Karuda laughed through her nose, and prepared her spear.

"Go in peace. To an invader, this is too much charity."

As though Karuda's words may not have entered her ears, Rihyalda fixed her gaze to Kuze.

"Yes, shogun?"

"Let me ask you one last thing..."

Kuze nodded.

"For what purpose did you hold your weapon?"

Kuze was startled. In this world and in his original world, not a single person had asked him that in such a straightforward manner. He wanted to smooth over the issue. But, he thought doing such a thing to a person about to die would be shameful. Kuze honestly answered.

"This might be a selfish reason, but it is to protect someone I wanted to protect."

To protect the country, might be the answer a commander in the SDF might have to say. But, he couldn't do that. Ultimately, he didn't hold the courage to do such a thing if there wasn't someone nearby that he wanted to protect.

Even if he was about to get killed himself, he probably couldn't pull the trigger. After Rihyalda let out a dry laugh, she vomited a large amount of blood.

"... I too... Was once like that."

After saying these parting words, Rihyalda died. Karuda watched the enemy

general with a complicated expression. Kuze bent down near her body. And, he closed her open eyes.

“... Karuda-san.”

“Yes?”

“People sure are quick to die, eh, on the battlefield...”

“Kuze-dono...”

Presently, Kuze made a decisive expression and raised his head. He returned to the barricade and grabbed a megaphone.

“Tell the empire’s officers and soldiers! That they must retreat from this nation, or order that they surrender after disarmament! In the case that they will not obey, we will not decline a decisive battle! Do they want to become like those dragon people?!”

Kuze’s exclamation reverberated into the castle. The pride of the empire’s elite soldiers was already shattered. No matter how sturdy, to no longer have a commander in whom you put so much trust into will break you. Morale break. That fear and despair which renders an army unable to function properly ruled over them.

“H... H... Her excellency the shogun has..”

“I-i-it’s the end...it’s already the end...”

Covered in black armor, one after another the knights who were supposed to be without peer in this world let out words of lament.

“Karuda-san.”

Kuze looked at Karuda with serious eyes.

“What?”

“If even one non-resistant person among them gets killed, then we will be their allies, you know.”

The Mariisua soldiers were startled. But, Karuda just nodded without reproach. It was not because she feared Kuze.

“Agreed. I will protect that agreement on my honor.”

The resistance from her countrymen was inevitable, but that is why she swore. It was not out of a sense of being indebted to the ones who saved her country or a sense of fear at the power that broke the empire's army that she swore such. It was just that she trusted this young man. She faced the enemy and raised her voice.

"Throw away your weapons! If you do so, we shall spare your lives!"

The empire's soldiers, perhaps because of a sense of security from these words, scrambled to start to throw away their weapons. Usually, at the end of a battle there were only the victors and the dead. Being prepared for that, then being given hope to live make one want to hold onto that hope: it was human nature.

Especially on a battlefield when one cannot hope for victory. Many Mariisua soldiers viewed the scene together in wonder. But, one group was seen making uneasy movements. There was a thirst for blood. It was from the resentment for having their mates and family killed. But, Karuda noticed and yelled.

"On my name, those who lynch anyone or run away from here will be treated as though they have rebelled against upper command."

To such force, they faced the empire's non-resistant forces and had no choice but to give it up.

"It's over...is it?"

Together with the refugees, Katou showed his face unexpectedly from the corridor from the throne room.

"I give permission to throw away your weapons with both hands raised and come here! Those who don't do this, stay where you are!"

At Karuda's words, beginning slowly, then immediately in large groups, those soldiers for the empire who had thrown away their weapons did so with a troubled expression. Somehow it looks to be over, said Katou, and he stroked down his chest.

Even if those who wanted to rebel existed, they couldn't overwhelm the Mariisua forces. In enemy territory, for a defeated organization to get back up and fight is surely impossible.

“Oh boy, the aftermath seems very troublesome... Huh?”

Katou had a bad feeling about one person going towards his direction.

“... Is he laughing?”

That man was walking to where Rihyalda’s body is being laid.

Part 4

“That was a terrible last moment, eh, shogun Rihyalda?”

The robed man seemed to be speaking in a sincerely happy tone to the corpse lying there. And, he saw one sword. The magic sword Balmanx. The sword Rihyalda had held with the blue jewel embedded into it. He—Genful—laughed. That weapon fit Rihyalda’s overwhelming charisma.

“I’ll do in those monsters from another world.”

The man stared at the strange boat floating in the bay.

“Kuku... But your death won’t be useless.”

Genful took something out of his pocket. It was an old crystal ball. It was a beautifully polished orb.

“It’s quite a fine *church*, eh, shogun?”

He said as though it were just common chatter, and he lifted up the sword covered in soot. He could feel the pulse of the sword’s magic power. He thought it was almost as if it was rejecting him. Perhaps a normal human could not easily hold it. However, he was a magic user. What’s more, he was fairly high-class, too. He was used to such resistance.

“A festival for the downfall of Brominia, such quite a discovery is to be found as the present of that nation’s idiots.”

He was talking about how the insistence of trying to take the throne was thanks to the knight unit missing the court mages.

“It’s because they think they are the center of the world. If I were destroyed or even if the world were destroyed, they probably would not think it matters. Using the archive, the magic of the ‘people of the wings’ was used to call forth

those monsters to this world.”

Genful lifted his crystal ball and stared into it.

“Yes, they are not of this world, shogun. In the case that you would die, I was ordered to settle the affairs.”

He continued to speak of Rihyalda’s magic sword. He was colored by the intoxication of madness.

“We must maintain the balance of this world. They are an existence we cannot have in this world. They are an existence that bends this world and calls for chaos in it.”

Genful saw a mountain of corpses.

“Ultimately, you were unable to stop them. So, I will offer to settle everything.”

He lovingly stared into his crystal ball, and noticed that the magic sword is shaking. Strong, frightening magic power was put into that crystal ball. The magic sword probably feels that.

“Kukuku... Have you ever heard of the fairy tale of the ‘falling stars’? It has been relayed to me that those people of the wings that are said to be destroyed used the ‘eye of the shooting star’ as a controlled weapon to rain down and hit rebels and savage tribes. No one believes the fairy tale... My church disagrees. The reason is because... It is right here... That ‘eye of the shooting star’.”

He put his hands out towards the sky and saw something in the crystal ball. It was not just a reflection of the sky’s scenery. In that crystal was a universe.

“This crystal itself is a magical tool of destruction, the controlling weapon the ‘falling star’, the ‘eye of the shooting star’.”

He took a commanding view of the burning city.

“If peace for this world is attainable by the vanishing of one country, then it would be quite cheap a price to pay.”

And, he thrust Rihyalda’s sword, which he had been holding in his hand, into the ground.

“I am happy. I am, right now, about to move to save the world after all.”

He laid bare the workings of his heart and mind by himself:

“You disdained me, but I also want to protect! The empire, the world!”

He held the crystal in both hands and started to focus his mind. The sweat on his forehead is not just because where he is standing is hot. This magic weapon is too strong for him alone to handle. And, he also understood that.

“To control this comes with a price. That price is my own life. But, I don’t mind. That is because my name will always be passed on in my church. Against those enemies from another world that the elites could not defeat, I will exchange my life to become a martyr!”

He didn’t have plans on a safe return. This is the death he hoped for. Immediately, his body started to shake. His heart beating fast, blood vessels show on his skin. While his focus was reaching its limits, the “eye of the shooting star” entered into Genful’s body.

And, the direct absorption of Genful began. Even with this, it is not enough. There is a need to supplement it with more. Genful was covered in darkness. The darkness, as though it lusted insatiably after the corpses scattered around, began to take them in. Devouring fresh blood and regret, the darkness swelled.

“Wh-what!? What’s happening?!”

A young man from the parallel world yelled. Genful was noticed by him, and Genful shook in a sense of superiority.

——Now, he has become a being that transcends everything. And, Genful was swallowed up by the darkness and became the darkness itself. However, somehow he managed to successfully gain control. He gushed with the greatest sense of achievement.

“Haha, hahahaha! Now... Monsters from another world, disappear with this country!”

Part 5

Feeling danger, Hamieea, who had run out to the terrace of the castle, was

terrified upon seeing the sky dyed red. If this world were to come to its end, surely this would be the color of the sky at that time. At least, this was the embodiment of this nation's "end".

Sweat formed on Hamieea's brown forehead. Being quite the erudite girl, she knew that this color had some meaning. In the literature of the ancient legends, there are repeated hints that one can see.

"'Falling star', is it?! That confounded empire! Dost thou desire so desperately to destroy this country?"

A maid rushed over to the girl crushed by despair.

"Y-your Highness, it is dangerous here! Please take refuge in the basement!"

"... Will not the meteor destroy places like the castle and its basements when it falls here?"

At that moment, Hamieea made a face fitting for her age. No matter how you struggle, the "falling star" was an attack that one could not be saved from no matter the measures one took.

"Even if they be military forces from realms beyond ours... This probably shalt remain impossible..."

She powerlessly bent her knees and sat on the terrace.

At the same time, Katou also squinted at the red sky. He had received communication from the fleet and knew that a meteorite was coming to fall on them. But, even for someone like him with knowledge in the "scientific" world, it was an unbelievable sight.

But, given his what can be called a talent for adaptability, he could accept this as reality. And, he thought it could be a form of attack that had such a meteorite fall.

"Somehow, they've managed to have the meteorite pinpoint this location...!"

Katou's guess was already about there.

With a handle on his occupation as a military member who rode on a destroyer, he grew an interest in how to guide attacks from long distances.

Even if this was brought about via magic, to have the meteorite target him and his crew to fall there must have a fitting difficulty, he thought. Somehow, the source of gravity for the thing might have to be around here.

“...No, it’s definitely like that.”

He looked at the sky’s disaster and glared at that monster that appeared.

“There’s no other choice.”

There was not a strange man who always didn’t seem like a self-defense force leader staring at his surroundings with weird eyes, but a major staff officer for the fleet burning with passion for his mission.

He would definitely not give up. The purely self-defense policy – which is what the SDF has accepted and which guides it in all its ways without going beyond it – to a heart open to the truth, means to destroy a nation’s forces. After all, if a basic deal cannot be made, you cannot work to decrease a little the damage that is to be done.

“Commander Kaburagi... We’re counting on you.”

He stared at the Aegis warship floating in the bay

In the same hour— —

The Aegis class destroyer, the “Ibuki”. The main objective of the enemy has been surrendered, and suddenly the operations specialist overlooking the radar at the now-loosened up CIC raised his voice to yell.

“C-commander!”

“What is it?”

Kaburagi sent the same worried voice his subordinate had used right back at him.

“There’s a slight reading on the radar! There is a possibility it is a flying corps from outside the atmosphere!”

“What?!”

No one could imagine what this really meant. However, there was only a common bad feeling among those present.

“Get a precise reading on the target.”

“Roger!”

The waves of the 3D radar, which go in every direction, were focused only on the target. This method is possible because there were no other enemies around.

“Th... This is!?”

At the result of the data analysis, the crew member grew pale.

“I-it’s a meteorite! A huge meteorite is falling towards us!”

“Meteorite!?”

The CIC was confused. The spontaneously developed photo was too real. A meteorite at this time was falling, and what is more, towards them. They didn’t understand how this would be possible at all, but they imagined it was somehow some sort of artificial attack by an enemy.

The Aegis System’s super computer calculated the destructive force of the falling meteorite and displayed the result. Upon seeing it, everyone was at a loss for words. It was an energy that would rival that of an atomic attack.

——They can’t be saved. They are on the verge of danger that is incomparable to earlier. Understanding this, the crew members’ faces became stiff. Despair ruled all of their hearts. There was no wondering at what to do. It was an atmosphere of everyone looking at each other and seeming to want to cry out. But, Kaburagi calmly asked.

“What is the projected time of impact?”

“A-about 20 minutes, we think!”

“Gah...!”

To the display of the estimated simulation of the meteorite’s fall, Kaburagi could only hold in his uneasiness.

Part 6

A man sharing Katou’s thoughts was on the ship. If he weren’t wearing the

black uniform of a marine leader and the gray life jacket, he'd look like a handsome middle-aged man. He was brilliant, but his on-the-spot, tactlessly straightforward decision making unfortunately made him a SDF leader who couldn't have a good career. He—Kaburagi—getting ahead of his worry, declared the next step to take.

“Activate the Ballistic Missile Defense System.”

“Y-yes!?”

The weapons officer who had accepted the order doubted his sincerity and soundness, and he reflexively looked at his face. In this unusual circumstance of having a meteorite coming to fall on you, many crew members had lost their composure. Kaburagi, knowing this, dished out some sound judgment.

The subordinates who fell into panic completely would cling to a calm commander. That was taken into account.

“Standard Missile 3, prepare to launch.”

Kaburagi was not being impatient. Still, there was something left for them to do. People have a strange mentality when “fate” gives them a large thing to stand against, where they give up or do nothing, or devote themselves to their own skin.

Kaburagi hated that. Being a man on the sea, he could not permit such an abject mentality.

Fight and struggle until the end!

Kaburagi is a good-natured man and doesn't talk much about this, but he is a person who has some passion in his heart.

“R-roger! SM3, standby!”

The weapons officer, while making a face as though he didn't understand the reason, doubted the command. The SM3 is an Intercontinental Ballistic missile which is launched to intercept an object a long distance away outside of the atmosphere: it is an extremely long-range attack missile.

The Aegis system includes GM software built-in, which allows for the launching and is cutting-edge in the field of defensive weaponry. But, it

technically has unfinished parts at this point, which makes it highly possible that the attack will be difficult.

It can be said to be as difficult as shooting a bullet from a pistol straight up and having the casing fall back into the same barrel.

“Launch with everything you’ve got!”

Kaburagi ordered. The weapons officer was dismayed.

“Y... You don’t mean to attack the meteorite!?”

Kaburagi affirmed it silently. It would be an unprecedented attempt. But, he had appraised the chances of success. It was like a multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV), except with only one target, not multiple.

Also, it was not as if you could detach the ballistic part of the missiles and have only the warheads fall. In short, this meteorite compared to ballistic missiles is overwhelmingly enormous. With a huge target, it is easy to hit.

The possibility was 50/50.

“Preparation to launch ready!”

It was like a bet. It was a bet that one would dislike to take, but there are times in life when you have to bet.

“I approve... This launch!”

Kaburagi believed in the “Ibuki”. The “Ibuki” was built on the preconception of defense against ballistic missiles as the marine SDF’s first Aegis-class destroyer. When suspicions concerning the “North”, to appease the international tensions around the world, the “Ibuki” was loaded to the brink with state-of-the-art tech. It is expected to be a shield to protect many people at the last moment.

(“Ibuki,” you are the last shield, even in this world...!)

In this parallel world. Against this atrocity no one can fight against., The only thing that can stop such a thing is this single destroyer with the Aegis system prepared alone. He was brought back to his memory of when he first laid eyes on the “Ibuki”. It was at the naming ceremony prior to the ship’s launching.

“The ‘Ibuki’, huh?”

“We’ve got another safe name.”

“The name of a piece of scrap that won’t ever fire even one shot...!”

Those words were whispered around. The source of the name “Ibuki” is an old Imperial Japanese cruiser, the “Ibuki”. It was a ship which was only halfway done being built by the end of WW2, and it was never used in even one battle by the end of its use.

But, Kaburagi was happy to be able to ride such a ship. After all, it would be a very proud thing to have your ship not get into a single battle for the Self-Defense Force. He clung onto belief in this lump of iron which held no meaning as if it were a god.

“Fiiiire!”

The weapons officer screamed. It was not just the vessel. The life of everything in this part of the world depended on this battle.



The VLS on the deck opened, and the standard missiles took off into the sky. There were ten missiles fired. They immediately surpassed the speed of sound barrier, and rose in the sky. To launch this many SM3s at the same time is not believable under normal circumstances. But, considering the target's largeness and how sturdy it will be, even this many makes one fear of not being adequate.

"The launch of the SM3 is confirmed: it should reach the target in 200 seconds!"

"The first stage has been purged!"

The SM3 missiles have 3 stages. The first stage of being shot via the boosters, the second stage of cruising, and the third stage of a direct hit with the equipped kinetic warhead. Its range is approximately four hundred and fifty kilometers, and its limit for ascending range is approximately two hundred and fifty kilometers.

That is, it has the ability to reach space.

The radar screen on the "Ibuki" displayed the attacking missile and the meteorite. The distance between the two was gradually shrinking.

"Second stage, the rocket is cut off! The nose cone is released. It has activated its kinetic warhead!"

Thirty seconds before reaching the target, the second stage releases the nose cone and activates stage three. Crossing many kilometers per second, they moved to meet their target at frightening speeds, and they were sure to be able to hit their target as they were able to make fine adjustments in their courses with highly precise seekers that used infrared lasers.

At that point in time, thirty seconds.

That is, after thirty seconds, everything will be decided. In the well air-conditioned CIC, the crew members had sweat pouring on their foreheads and the napes of their necks due to being nervous.

"B-before the counter attack, 10 seconds..."

The wildly sighing member in charge of the attack reported. Already, on the screen, the target and the missiles were set to meet up neatly. Finally, they broke into the steps of the countdown.

“Five...four...three...two...standby...”

With his fist grasping onto the desk really tightly, Kaburagi closed his eyes forcefully. Their fate, no, the fate of thousands, tens of thousands, millions of people in this country would be determined in that second, and none of them can look up at the result. The scream of the crew member in charge of the firing reached their ears.

“— —Mark, intercepted!”

Light shone in the sky.

Chapter 6: A Hymn to the Living

Part 1

Genful, in the midst of joy and pain, saw that moment. No, it may be more accurate to say he felt it. Sucked into the crystal with the darkness of malice surrounding it, he began to lose his human figure. The compensation for the *'falling star'*

was not the caster's 'life' as the hearsay would have it. The compensation was the caster's 'self'.

A change would occur to turn the person into an existence which wasn't a *'person'*

. Under normal circumstances. Genful's tenacity was so fierce that even now, though swallowed up by the darkness, he still maintained his self. He was supported only by his crooked desire to see those strange beasts that stormed their way into this world destroyed, in exchange for this nation with his own eyes.

But, against his wishes, a great flash was in the sky. It was perhaps similar to a lightning, glimmering in the dark sky. He noticed that something had been done to the meteorite. His body inside the crystal felt the pain of the meteorite.

—At being hit by the 10 kinetic warheads sent out by the Aegis Destroyer, the meteorite experienced getting hit directly by a gigajoule of energy. That was the equivalent of getting a direct hit to the face by something like a hundred ton ball made of steel, at the speed of light.

The great speed of the meteorite's attack was slowed. And, taking the attack, it did not just split but scattered about into pieces. The large meteorite formed into dozens of smaller meteorites of various sizes.

But—it is not as though its destructive power was made null. Genful

understood that even though its original power to completely destroy the people from a parallel world and Mariisua had been reduced, it still held just quite enough destructive capability to cause a lot of damage.

“Hahahahaha! Fine! Everything will turn to dust! Everything! Everything!”

Genful laughed loudly. His wish would be fulfilled in just a short time. There was no one who could take him down. There should be no one who can stop those meteorites. He was intoxicated by that feeling of conquest. That laughing voice of his which roared in the castle served as a symbol of this country’s despair.

Part 2

“The target upon impact has broken to pieces! It has broken into 63 smaller pieces!”

“Can we shoot them down?!”

“W-well, roughly 40% of them pose a destructive threat by the time they fall to sea level! Again, a large number have the possibility of directly hitting this ship and land!”

“Kuh, and the second wave of attacks?”

Kaburagi immediately said to the weapons officer. But, he himself already understood that they had no cards left on the table.

“N-no good! It would not meet in time!”

The meteorite was threatening to be too close of a distance to attack with the SM3. To defy the attack of the flying object out of the atmosphere, in intercepting it, there had been only one chance. The radar indicated the groups of scattered, smaller meteorites which scattered like spider children.

“Is that it for what we humans can do against this...!?”

Kaburagi scowled at the groups of meteorites which would get rid of everything. And, he intuitively knew that someone designed this attack. This meteorite attack would not fit that enemy shogun’s ‘aesthetics’ of settling things in battle. In other words, this attack is one with strange motives. Again,

the goal is not merely to destroy the nation – In the middle of his utmost stress, his thinking was interrupted. This was not the time for such.

“The groups of meteorites will hit this ship in 15 minutes!”

“All crew members, prepare for the impact!”

Fastening the strap of their gray helmets, the crew members prepared for the impact of the meteorite falling. But, if they take direct hits from the meteorites, such things will prove meaningless. The sense of powerlessness from leaving everything to fate ruled over all of them.

Part 3

“Did the intercepting missiles hit the meteorite!?”

Seeing the Aegis war vessel’s missiles fire and seeing the lightning like flicker afterward let Kuze know the answer. For a moment, he thought he could see hope, but normal vessels cannot fire enough missiles against such a giant meteorite. That the fragments would fall here was told to him earlier by Katou.

“... Even with the Aegis class warship, it is impossible!”

Kuze yelled out of regret, his angered voice rose very far. Upon seeing this, the soldiers in the middle of the courtyard gathered.

“Th-this darn apparition!?”

“Where did you come from?!”

The soldiers of Mariisua tried to attack a strange black mass. Next to the body of the enemy shogun, out of a mysterious figure was a black mist of sorts. The thing squirming around and growing giant couldn’t be thought of as a living being. If one had to venture to call it something—darkness.

Kuze scowled at that monster.

Just what is it? Does it have some sort of connection with the falling meteorite?

To such strangeness, 50 Mariisua soldiers attacked at once with their swords. But, before they could get too close, they were all repealed. The head of the Mariisua soldiers was shocked.

“I-is this... Barrier magic!?”

It was that moment. From the black tentacles like the splinters of a sea urchin stretched toward the soldiers. Then, it pierced their hearts and again moved to strangle them, wiping them out. Seeing this scene, Kuze yelled.

“It has been decided that this target is hostile... Begin firing on it!”

He decided that if they didn’t stop the monster, it could reach out and hurt the refugees. At Kuze’s orders, the SDF members took the spot of the annihilated Mariisua soldiers and added the shots of their type 89 assault rifle from the back.

But the bullets did not appear to be hurting the mass even after penetrating the black mist’s black body. The attack reached a stalemate. Kuze ordered that subordinates stop at once. The SDF could not make any assumptions with their attacks against such an existence beyond human understanding.

“Kuze-dono...”

When she got there, she placed her hand on Kuze’s shoulder.

“If you don’t go now, you won’t make it in time.”

Kuze saw her gentle smile.

“Karuda-san...?”

“Ride that iron flying object. If you run away in that, you might be spared.”

But, somewhere, she was lonesome. Exactly what was her intent?

Kuze felt a moment of confusion, but immediately realized something. She was trying to save Kuze. But, why go so far? He couldn’t understand the reason

for her courtesy.

“Thank you... But, it’s already fine.”

Karuda made an expression of feeling a sense of resignation. She had paid the greatest respect one can give a soldier: Gratitude.

Kuze felt a lump in his throat.

“If it ends like this... All of that was meaningless.”

He couldn’t look at her face. Let’s explain what him boarding the helicopter here means to him. That means he would be abandoning those refugees he had been putting his whole power into protecting. It means only his men could run from the destruction of the meteorite.

Everything he had done to help those there now had been made worthless. Yes, he was no brave hero. In the end, he wouldn’t be able to protect a single person. Filled with regret, he was consumed with a desire to strike himself down.

—And, it was at that moment.

“Sorry to interrupt you since you’re busy, but are you ready for the next plan? We don’t have enough time.”

A man wearing a white marine uniform for the SDF abruptly said that to Karuda and Kuze, who had become sentimental, were dumbfounded at such naïve utterance. But he entirely would not admit shock or despair. Kuze stared at the man—Commander Katou’s—face. Katou laughed from inside of his glasses.

“This is still not game over. Lately, the boss fight being a time-limit event in games has not been rare, right?”

“Lieutenant Colonel Katou...”

“Don’t give up. You’re a commander, aren’t you?”

Katou gave him a wink.

Kuze felt that in the midst of his despair, a faint amount of hope welled up. This man is such an oddball. There was still a reason to fight. He shouldn't give up. So, he seemed dependable. Kuze strangely nodded. Katou also returned a nod to Kuze.

"First, let's sort out the situation. Karuda-san,"

"What?"

Katou gazed at the wiggling black monster squirming into the red sky above and on the Earth.

"Karuda-san, care to briefly tell us, about that object, what do you think about it...?"

"A... Ah, there's no definitive proof, but..."

Karuda groaned.

"Isn't that meteorite from that monster using 'falling star?' I'm guessing."

"Eh?! 'Falling Star'?"

"Yes. About that..."

Karuda started to explain what she knew about it. The 'Falling Star' is a one-use weapon that may really exist according to researchers. Though it is a myth and a fairytale, there have been descriptions here and there that tell us about it taking a sacrifice. In other words, "Falling Star" takes the user and the target with it, to destruction.

Now, this is only written in unclear terms. It seems as though those who relayed this throughout history have tried to conceal the truth about it. Again, the "Eye of the Fallen Star", a controller of the 'Falling Star' is described in many different ways despite being one single object.

They didn't leave out the form as having a "universe" inside it, but said such things such as that it was precisely a crystal or a cane with a crystal in it or that it was a ring with one inside it. The researchers erected the hypothesis that, rather than controlling the 'Falling Star', the life of the user would be burned up to create a sort of gravity device to bring the meteorite in. Upon hearing her explanation, Kuze said what flitted through his mind.

"In short, it would be fine if we could do something about the controller that black monster is holding?"

He thought maybe they could evade the meteorite if they destroyed the gravity equipment. Karuda also was dubious about it, but she nodded her head as if to say "Probably."

"But, the user described must not have had a small reason for doing something like this... After you use it you become like that, it is probably more painful than death."

The info on this was kept fuzzy to protect the people. In other words, in the ancient civilizations, this information about the technique was kept under tyrannical regulation.

"Well, that's the way it is. Let's get right to the point. There are tactical tomahawks aboard the 'Ibuki'."

Katou said hurriedly. Kuze thought back to where he heard such a simple term.

"By tomahawk, do you mean the cruiser missiles? Eh... Well, if we are able to use that in a counterattack against that thing, will we deploy it?"

Katou consented with a meek expression. The tomahawk cruise missile. It was the latest model of effective shooting distance missiles, with a range of an approximated 3,000 kilometers as a long-range grounded anti-warship missile.

It is a famous weapon developed in the Gulf War and is pretty much a synonym for "a pinpoint attack which has become the symbol for high-tech warfare". On the other hand, it is a weapon not allowed to be used by the SDF as SDF has an inviolable rule to be strictly on the defense and is not allowed to use weapons made specifically to attack other countries.

“But, the times are changing. No, they seem like they will change, so here we have a preliminary test for our navy. A certain country is pointing its newest ballistic missiles at Japan while its own people are starving

“Even if we defend against the first round, the second, and third rounds of attacks, no matter how many Aegis class warships with intercepting missiles or above-ground deployed PAC 3s we have, even if we try our best, our defense will fail. So...”

“Wouldn’t destroying that enemy organization’s missile launch base via pinpoint be an action within the bounds of the policy of absolute non-aggression?”

To Kuze’s interpretation, Katou sarcastically laughed.

“Ah. That’s why the ‘Ibuki’ was added in for this PKF deployment. There were plans to practice using the new model tomahawks in Africa before the deployment.

“In a sophisticated environment, without much media coverage, we could launch the largest scale of attack. We could also practice with the American military. There weren’t more favorable conditions than these.”

“That must have been the reason why the land forces certainly did hold a lot of new makes of weapons, to be sure.”

“Correct. That was the condition for the marines.”

“... But didn’t you announce it? I didn’t know anything about the tomahawks despite being in the SDF like you.”

“As a political decision, only a portion of people know. Of course, this was kept private from the media. Commander Kaburagi was flown there along with me, the weirdo, and other commander types, in the off chance that some sort of bad situation erupt; the higher-ups decided to give us the responsibility to pretend to know nothing to lead the dispatch.”

Kuze was amazed.

“But that sounds terrible...”

“No, it is because of this that we may be saved, no?”

“Let’s listen to the whole story.”

“It is a good thing you are one to understand such a story.”

At some point, Katou realized that the people around him looked at him with eyes full of expectation. It was no different whether it was his fellow SDF or the people of this world. Everyone looking for some living hope looked his way.

“For whatever plan we have to succeed, first I will say this. That black monster will get blown apart very soon.”

“Blown apart? And very soon?”

Everyone returned the words like a parrot and tilted their heads.

“Yes, blown apart. We need a large amount of infrared lasers and... maybe a strong heat as well. This is all to ensure that we use our weapon that is powerful enough to defeat that monster.”

“That weapon would be the ‘tomahawk’?”

“Yes. Originally, the tomahawk had to be guided to hit the target by artificial satellites, but what we’ve got on board is the new model which can fire many shots, the tactical tomahawk. This new version is guided by infrared lasers detecting the target.”

The upper commandment of the SDF understood the need to be sure to hit the heat source of the nuclear missile launch base of a certain country. If they used some sort of movable system to launch their nuclear missiles, there would be danger in using the wrong coordinates.

Karuda and her group, though vaguely, believed that this discussion was about using the weapons used to destroy the dragons and the empire’s military on the monster.

“So, this plan depends on lighting that monster on fire.”

At Katou’s words, everyone made a conflicted expressions on their faces.

There was a reason for that. The arrows and bullets that would go through would become like a mist in the monster's real body. And if you'd challenge it with swords and lances to an up-close battle, it would use barrier magic to keep everyone away and not let anyone get near.

Somehow, it seemed it "intentionally" uses barrier magic as a reaction against them. Arrows and bullets, things you'd attack with that would leave your hand, didn't seem to cause the same reaction.

The range was wide; if you got close enough to throw a grenade to reach the monster, it would probably react. And, it would be activated automatically: if you divert its attention to something else, the reaction would still happen and not become invalid.

What would be good enough to tear through the barrier magic, light the monster on fire, and allow a direct hit on the monster with a missile?

It was when they were stricken with worries.

"We will also help."

From beside them came a clear voice.

"Ryumi-san?"

From where the voice came from stood ten girls, who were priest soldiers for the gods in full armament. Ryumi's figure was among them.

"Would we be of assistance in this battle?"

She asked with an expression full of determination. And, before Kuze and company could respond, she continued.

"If it is weakened, the barrier magic will stop. From what I've seen, that monster seems to be an undead type. Holy magic might be effective. We, the unit of priest soldiers, for the gods of the Church of the Mother of Light, though we are but apprentices, shall join this battle."

Those girls who had seen the desperate fighting of the SDF up until this point made up their minds to join in the fight. Seeing the state of affairs, Karuda made a face as though she were taken aback.

“I have a proposal.”

Katou, upon seeing her, nodded.

“Go ahead.”

“What about this plan? First, we will put our full power into an attack, and avert the monster’s power.”

Karuda fixed her gaze on Ryumi and company.

“Then, without wasting a moment, you guys (priest soldiers) hit it with your holy magic, and weaken the monster. When he can’t use his barrier magic, you guys (JSDF) get close and use the thing you used to defeat that dragon, that... uh—”

“The 84 mm recoilless rifle?”

“Yes, with that, you attack it and create an opening. And I’ll surround it at the flank and use this.”

Karuda raised the sword next to her. It was an ominously beautiful sword with a jewel buried into it.

“What’s that?”

“Earlier, the monster flung this outward, and it was recovered by my subordinates. This is the magic sword Balmanx. This is what the enemy shougun held. It is a sword invested with unparalleled, ferocious magic power.”

“What shall we do to use that sword to catch that monster on fire?”

Katou had a dubious face. To that man's question, Karuda boldly laughed.

"I can more or less use this magical sword. Using the magic power of this sword, we will attack the monster with flame magic. If we do that—"

Oooh, those watching let out together.

"We will light him up good! Using the infrared lasers, we'll thrust that tomahawk into it."

Kuze screamed and at once, Katou wrinkled his brow.

"Karuda-san, can I ask something?"

"What's the issue?"

"Oh it's not like that, just, when you say flame magic, do you mean you'd throw a fireball at the enemy?"

"Yes, that exactly."

"Then, if it leaves the technique caster's hand, then would it lack the power to break through the barrier magic? If so, I think we should look for the minimum amount of risk."

Karuda shook her head.

"Magic is affected by the intention of the caster, wherein the intention is reflected back into the real world. Even if it leaves the caster's hand, it is the embodiment of intention, but beyond that, it probably can't break through the barrier magic."

"I understand. Well, the holy magic isn't the flame type? If we can make it weaker at the same time as we attack, wouldn't the conversation be quick?"

The one to answer that was Ryumi.

“It may be regrettable, but holy magic is borrowing the power of the gods. There is no magic like that for your idea. I also agree with Karuda-sama’s plan.”

“I see... If it is as you say, then Karuda-san’s plan seems like the only viable option...”

Katou whispered. Suddenly, he super-seriously believed in magic, and though he remembered his original discomfort with the plan, he didn’t pay much attention to that.

“After that is our bout with the thing. We can just try and see what happens.”

Katou said as he worked himself up.

“There is no way the gods would abandon those who don’t give up. Surely, we have divine protection.”

A meek smile appeared on Ryumi’s face.

“Then, let’s go. Even if there’s no positive proof that things will go well, I want to do what we can.”

With a serious expression, Karuda looked over everyone.

She and Kuze locked gazes.

“Karuda-san, it’s dangerous for just one person. You should probably have some support. I’ll go with you.”

“This is my nation’s problem. You who have no connection to this should...”

“No, it’s not as though I have no connection to it. And now, if this plan should fail, we’ll be connected when we go to the next world of the afterlife.”

For a moment, Karuda’s eyes popped with astonishment at the unexpected words. Kuze made a small laugh. It spread to her and made her smile. No, she thought of something unusual.

When was the last time she smiled and laughed so honestly like this?

Could it be... Never has such a thing happened since that person’s death?

Karuda stared at Kuze, who was in front of her. And, she made up her mind.

That she would not let anyone else die.

“Then, I’m counting on you. I entrust this duty to you, knight from another world.”

Part 4

Genful struggled to continue watching the stunned humans, as he was immersed in a feeling of superiority. Fate would no longer change. He saw the group’s cries of despair, but it wouldn’t be bad to see their futile efforts to their harsh end.

The barrier magic repelled the weapons of the Mariisua soldiers, and the weapons of those people from another world went into his own body, and he could feel them. That group from a parallel world were also desperate.

He thought such, and being able to drive those who defeated Rihyalda so far so quickly put him in a state of ecstasy. What a wonderful time he experienced and he continued laughing.

“The Mariisua weapons have no effect!”

“Bullets pass through, but they don’t cause damage!”

“Don’t falter! The shrine maidens are going! Support fire!”

While Kuze heard these reports on his wireless communication device, he shouldered the 84 mm recoilless rifle as he crawled forward in the fourth type of crawl (TL: of the JSDF) in the side of the flowerbed in the corner of the courtyard.

The fourth type of crawl is when you move forward with the greater half of your body on the ground. With his body low like that, it should be a blind spot for the monster to where it cannot see him. Behind him was Karuda, who learned to crawl the same by watching Kuze.

“Haahaa... You’re pretty skilled at crawling on the bare ground...”

Carrying no other equipment but the magic sword crawling forward in a way

she's not used to is like some sort of penance. Kuze made a wry smile.

"This is the training we've done for our job after all."

"You're a knight who crawls on the bare ground for your job, eh..."

Saying something so ironic, Karuda was happy. They were covered in mud in a terrible condition. For such a decisive battle, fighting from the soil and dirt seemed odd.

"Even if we go to the afterlife for soldiers, if we tell this story, it'll be good a joke material."

"Let's joke about it over some alcohol, in this world, not the next."

"For sure."

Before long, those two reached the back of the monster. It hadn't noticed both of them yet. That's a good sign, Kuze thought.

"After Ryumi tears through the barrier, you should attack it, and in that opening I will break into it."

Kuze nodded to Karuda's words. He prepared to set up the 84 mm recoilless rifle to attack. He looked through the scope and set his aim on the monster.

Ryumi's group moved forward while protected by the SDF fire. Here, there was no distinction between worlds. It was just a battleground for those who wouldn't give up on living. With resolute faces, Ryumi's group focused in front of them and, holding hands, all at once started the aria for the magic.

"Become a miracle light that tears through the darkness! Cleanse the darkness into light! Come forth, oh light! Shine, O light!"

And, light began pouring forth from their hands. The light itself was like a giant sun, and with this purifying light magic, the darkness would be cleansed. The darkness Genful was clad in began to deteriorate, one step after another. Somehow, just barely, the barrier magic was able to resist.

"Those guys definitely fulfilled their promise of protection. This time, it is our turn to fulfill our promise!"

Ryumi's group continued to grow in power as their aria continued. A sign of at

least anguish appeared on their faces, desperately. And, quickly, any resistance disappeared. To the girls' incantation, the barrier magic disappeared.

But, with only ten priest soldiers of the gods' purifying light, they couldn't completely purify that existence which had become darkness itself.

The monster stretched out the tentacles which had become its own body to attack the girls.

"Agh!?"

The black tentacle which wrapped itself around Ryumi's body bent around her face. The tentacle held her and pulled her up from the ground into the air.

"Hahahahahahaha! Cry! Shout! Be filled with despair!"

That laughter became something that is no longer human. The tentacle playing with Ryumi held her up, and the girl's suffering became some enjoyment for Genful.

But——

"... Fubu!"

In the midst of pain, Ryumi smiled.

"Hmmm..."

When Genful realized that something felt off, it was already too late. In the middle of the flowerbed to the side, a man clad in clothes that seemed to become one with the vegetation screamed.

"Target straight ahead, aim is good! Fire!"

There was an outpouring of flames. Something entered and hit the actual body of Genful at a hypersonic speed and exploded, raising flames and dust all about.

"Gaaaaaaaagh!?"

Genful was hit with an impact that destroyed his body into pieces.

"Blast you! You pathetic snakes!"

With his power of concentration in shambles, the tentacles he had made to

be part of his body returned to mist. In addition, the girls who he was holding up were dropped to the ground as he screamed more.

He had been careless. But, Genful didn't think that it was fatal. He had his pride. Before he could regain his balance, there came something moving toward him from the dust cloud. It was a woman.

“Ooooooooooooooooooh!”

She pushed herself through the dust cloud which surrounded her and stood in front of Genful. She carried the magic sword Balmanx. Genful doubted it.

—*Surely, the one who carried it, Rihyalda, died an ugly death...*

“Roar, oh blade! Bring forth that flame which destroys all!”

Flames leapt out. And, in the next moment, Genful's body was on fire. That woman, using the magic sword, let flames loose.

“Guaaaaaaagh!?”

As if giving her all with this magic sword, flames continued to go out onto him. Flames wrapped all around Genful's body. With his confusion, he didn't know who was in front of his eyes.

“I won't forgive you! I won't forgive you... *Rihyaldaaaaaaaaaa!*”

“Kaah!”

That woman—Karuda—let go of the magic sword as she began to take refuge; Katou, who had been watching over the battle situation, screamed into the radio.

“We have confirmed a heat source! I demand to launch the tomahawk!”

“Understood! Please save the point of impact!”

After ending the communication with the “Ibuki”, Katou saw the missile take flight. The violent flames of the rocket booster flew high to the heavens. The dazzling combustion of the rocket booster ended, and the 3-stage tomahawk cut off part of its rocket booster, and prepared the fin-stabilized rocket for cruising. The range of the tactical tomahawk was usually 3,000 kilometers. But,

the target this time was frighteningly close. Without wasting even a few minutes, it should make contact.

“Second Lieutenant Kuze! The missile has launched! Quickly get away from there! It will swallow you up!”

Katou called out on the radio with a strained voice. But, the voice Kuze used to respond was even more urgent and tense.

“Karuda-san is still left behind near the monster!!”

Part 5

(I’m taking an embarrassing defeat...!)

While Karuda tried to run away, the monster’s tentacles stretched and grasped around her feet as if to pull her into its body. She grit her teeth and clung onto the edge of the flower bed.

Soon, something which would destroy everything like an iron hammer would come raining down from that boat from a parallel world. Soon enough, she too would be taken as collateral into the next world.

“You won’t escape... You won’t escape Rihyaldaaa! We’ll both fall to hell together!”

Many tentacles stretched forth from the monster’s real body, and clung onto her whole body. Karuda dug her nails into the dirt to resist, but she couldn’t bare it any longer.

Is this it?

is the type of feeling of giving up that swelled up inside her.

—And, she heard an explosion from the direction behind her. When Karuda looked, she could see the many tentacles blown to bits by the blast. The power pulling onto Karuda weakened.

Impossible! She thought.

“Karuda-san!”

It was Kuze. He had thrown away the recoilless rifle which had run out of ammo and had thrown a grenade as he ran over to her.

“I have come to help you!”

Saying this, he took out the knife on his type 89 rifle—a bayonet—and cut off the tentacles still stubborn enough to cling to her.

“Shoot! Get off, you!”

He desperately was cutting off the tentacles from her legs, but they were tougher to get off than he expected, so it wasn’t going well. Karuda yelled.

“Stop, Kuze-dono! Leave me here! At this rate, you too will die!”

“Sorry. You may be fine with it, but I can’t do something like that!”

“Everyone will understand! The countrymen of Mariisua...”

“To abandon a beautiful woman like you and continue living and return to my world would cause me such great shame, I couldn’t possibly live with it!”

Kuze wryly smiled at Karuda, who didn’t grasp the meaning of his words and looked ahead dumbfounded. He didn’t want to accept any more deaths. After this, to sleep well at night, he couldn’t abandon her. There was no relation between the calm decision of a soldier and situations that couldn’t be helped.

“P-please, Kuze-dono! Don’t give me any more regrets! You...”

Karuda was bewildered that Kuze would be trying to save her so desperately.

“I don’t want you to die!”

Even she wondered at what she was saying. But, she meant it wholeheartedly. At this rate, two would be lost. She’d again lose a person like that. There was only that fear.

“I too don’t want you to die, really!”

Kuze shouted. Karuda didn’t say anything back. Because, as a knight, she’s

tried to save others, she's tried to protect others, so she's never given much thought to herself needing to be saved. And, he said that, and that man from a parallel world... Somewhere, he resembles that man.

"Really, you are starting to look like a hypocrite just as that shougun said. To say you couldn't bare to leave such a beautiful woman behind while you live on."

"Th-this isn't the time for such jokes..." "I wouldn't risk my life for a joke, seriously!"

Kuze swung his bayonet downward with all of his body's might. With a thick sound, he stood, and finally, Karuda was free of all the tentacles.

"Hurry!"

She reflexively grasped his outstretched hand. After using much strength and power to be spared, they ran away together. In the midst of this limit-pushing situation, she felt a faint sense of nostalgia.

The decided date of her wedding in the summer when she was 17. She ran out of her parents' home and enjoyed a short time of freedom. Before the constraint of a political marriage, that tiny bit of freedom with no other partner but him was the glorious memory she had.

A couple who of a young man and a young girl who both knew not fear or the like... She realized she hasn't moved a bit forward since that time. After the person she had decided to move forward and walk together with died, she hasn't moved forward at all.

Like a mourning dress, she wrapped herself in her military uniform, having never stepped a single foot into a new life. Somewhere in her, she had desired a death on the battlefield.

Yes, she surely wanted something like this. To grasp that person's hand, and run off together. She said Kuze was a hypocrite. And, above all, she was this

way. It would have been good if she hadn't prayed for the fortunes of war for the man going to the battlefield.

While she wanted her own freedom, she wouldn't throw away the dignity of being a noble. So, she warned him of being a knight. While wanting him to live...

That time, before he had to go to the battlefield. Why didn't I cling to him? I was a coward. Would it have been good if only he had lived? If so, then why did I pray for the fortunes of war with a yearning face? Kuze's old lover is a strong woman. If she really wants him to return home. If she wishes for the man she loves to live. What I first said needed to be said. That I didn't want him to go.

"Shoot... Will we make it in time?!"

"Sorry..."

"It's fine! Don't worry about it!"

Her apology was not just to him. Yes, that is how it was. Karuda had realized it. The true reason she continued to wear this military uniform like mourning clothes. It was because she felt like she had killed that person. Her beloved man dying was the punishment for her foolish actions as she didn't give up on the nobility part of herself.

There were no reasons for a person like Kuze to have to save her. But, he still moved to save her. And, even though she felt as though she was saved, she thought she was beyond help. Yet at the same time, she was so happy she could scream. She too was a hypocrite.

—And.

"Ah!?"

Suddenly, with a jerk, Kuze, who had been running, lost his balance and fell.

"Kuze-dono!?"

Karuda was in a hot haste to be saved, but it isn't going too well.

"This...!?"

Upon seeing this, one tentacle caught a hold of his leg. That was the tenacity of the monster.

"Hahaahahaaa! You're coming with me, monsters from another world! Summoned troops! Rune troopers!"

"Confound it...!"

Kuze tried kicking the tentacle with his boot, but it was holding on so tightly it didn't budge at all. Karuda got out the bayonet Kuze had at his waist and tried to cut it. But, faster than that, countless tentacles came to attack the two.

"Waaaaagh!?"

The tentacles grasped them as if to pull them into its main body, and held Kuze and Karuda up.

"Karuda-san, this impossible nonsense!"

Seeing this as their end after everything, Kuze felt a sense of anger at his final end. At least, he wanted to save her. But, it was no longer a question of what to do. Those black tentacles would freely steal everything from them.

"Kuze-dono, ah...? Kuze-dono!!"

Karuda raised her woefully screaming voice. Feelings of impatience and guilt disturbed her heart.

(Is this punishment? Punishment for letting him die? Oh gods!)

By her fault, her beloved was led into death, and again, now, this young man from a parallel world would die here. If this is a punishment from Heaven, it is cruel one.

“Please save just him!”

Karuda screamed in a fittingly fearful tone. She would go down to hell. She couldn't go to the realm of the dead for soldiers. But, still, she didn't want Kuze to die. After this, he'd save many other lives.

And, surely he'll meet a good military woman to spend their lives together in happiness with. His death will be the misfortune of so many. So, not for my sake, but for all those who will meet him—those were the kind of pleas coming from Karuda at that time.

“... Ga... Ga... Commanding officer Kuze—!... Ga... Ga...”

The wireless communication device shouted.

“Is that Sergeant Yaegashi?!”

While Kuze was murmuring, he heard someone's voice. —And, in the middle of the darkness he saw a splendid light.

“Oh Light, illuminated the darkness. Oh Light, fill everything!”

He could hear an incantation. No way he thought, but they were trying to give Kuze a way to escape from the darkness. As though it was melting, the tentacles were shrinking away from him is what Kuze thought. It was Ryumi. Ryumi and company put forth all the power of the priest soldiers of the gods and used every kind of holy magic to cause this darkness to recede.

This is probably their last chance. Kuze looked for the desperate Karuda from inside the darkness. And, he once again grasped her hand and dragged her out. With the light making it as if there is an intense spotlight on them, Kuze held onto Karuda and rolled out.

“Kuze... San...?”

“Are you alright?”

Karuda stared at his face, which was covered with mud. In the middle of the light of the holy magic, the feeling she had when Kuze held her tight was suffocating. That feeling she had on that last happy day when she was held tight by that person was brought back. But, that wouldn't last long. Yes, it was not over yet. They must live on. He must, as well as herself.

“Platoon Leader Kuze! Here!”

There was the shrill engine sound and the violent down wash in the courtyard. For an instant, Kuze didn't understand what it was. This is!?

Two black hawk transport helicopters were flying there. It was the helicopter the ground squad had to take off with.

It had finished being replenished and had returned. To save their mates. Ryumi and company who continued with their holy magic aria had sent out the magic light to help board the helicopter. The other helicopter set up to land.

“There is no time! Get us from the side!”

“Yaegashiii!”

Kuze screamed and moved forward with Karuda with her holding onto his shoulder. They both had wounds all over their body. With the side door fully open, the black hawk approached them. Yaegashi and company added to the cover of fire being aimed at the monster. The wind became fierce. The black hawk moved in front the two of them and hovered there.

“Karuda-san, ahead of me!”

Kuze pushed Karuda into the cabin ahead of him, using force. And, he also moved to ride as well. But...

“Ugh!?”

“Nhghooooooooh—! Rune trooooopeeeeeers!”

The monster which had been inflicted with so much damage now stretched a tentacle and caught Kuze by the leg.

“Kuze-dono!”

Karuda moved to get out of the helicopter but was stopped by Yaegashi. Kuze desperately clung to the helicopter, but the tentacles moved to bring the whole helicopter down. But, in the next moment, the tentacle holding onto Kuze was torn to pieces. Kuze was taken aback. He couldn’t hear a gunshot. No, as he thought that, he heard the delayed gunshot sound. It was a long-range sniper!

“Yes, it hit!”

“Yeah!-”

Ichinose and Rarona, in the minaret, mutually clapped each others’ hands together in celebration.

Getting on to ride the helicopter, Kuze laughed. He may be a stupid, cheeky brat, but he’s a good subordinate. The pilot yelled.

“We will rise in altitude. Hold on tight!”

“There’s not much time until the tomahawk!”

“Here it comes!”

The black hawk at once raised in altitude so it could flee from the impact point.

At the same time, the monster’s anger at the thing from a parallel world they are riding in also rose.

“Nooooooooooo! You accursed rune trooooopeeeeeers! You outsiders that got mixed with this woooooorld!”

Part 6

Right in front of the howling monster, the 3-stage tactical tomahawk missile

entered into its final sequence.

—The target was detected by its heat source, and with a straight course to attack with no problems, everything was all green. Those in the CIC of the “Ibuki” could watch the scene via the missile’s camera. The digital footage quickly zoomed up on the burning monster. No, it did not zoom up, it quickly rushed into it. Right before it showed the impact, the electronic alarm reverberated.

Piiii—

For an instant the screen showed only the monster, but immediately the image changed to one of a sandstorm. There was a meaning for this.

“The target has been hit and completely destroyed!”

The officer in charge of this attack raised his voice to deliver the report.

Part 7

“Gaaagh!”

Genful writhed as he was eaten up by the flames of the explosion causing everything to vanish. And the crystal melted due to the intense heat. With the crystal controller gone, the meteor would probably lose its way to its target. He risked his life and his wish for which he had done all this had collapsed.

“Why!? Why this?!”

He didn’t understand what kind of attack he had taken, but he was sure that someone had done this to him. He, while in the middle to being destroyed, engulfed in anger and hatred, screamed.

“Haha... Hahahahahaha! It isn’t over with just this, people from another world! You’re existence in this world is something that cannot be! This world will erase you! That is your fate!”

Part 8

In the CIC of the Aegis destroyer “Ibuki”, the operations specialist raised his

voice in surprise to a sudden change.

“Many small groups of meteorite bits have changed their course!”

“What!?”

Kaburagi fixed his eyes on the radar screen. Many of them were set to fall in a direct path to hit here, but their courses were changed. The points where they would fall were probably all over the place.

“The change in the center of gravity and the air resistance have caused them to deviated from their courses.”

The weapons officer delighted in the faint hope to be seen. Now, it looked like they were positioned to fall into the ocean, far away. And, many which had not yet gotten past the atmosphere would naturally decrease to the state of annihilation due to the frictional heat.

But, Kaburagi was not released of all worry. Again the weapons officer yelled.

“S-still, there are those that will get past the atmosphere and fall here!”

Even though they were small meteorites, their destructive power was still that of a few megatons. There’d be no saving them if they were directly hit. But, that was up to the realm of luck.

But, for some reason, Kaburagi had the feeling that they wouldn’t get hit. And, that was right.

Part 9

In the helicopter, Karuda felt like she was watching the end of the world. The royal capital lit on fire by the dragons and currently burning: Seiroad. While you could say there was a very faint gladness about the situation, fragments of the meteorites directly hit the town.

“...In this place that is beyond Hell, there is nothing left for us.”

Without thinking, she whispered. It was a complaint. Usually, it might be something that wouldn’t come out of a knight’s mouth. However, she said it as there was someone there who could take it.

“Surely there’s something here.”

The young man who came here from a different world far away answered without hesitation.

“Like what, exactly?”

Kuze thought for a bit, then said with a wry smile.

“The future, perhaps...”

“Can there be a revival from how it is now?”

“Sure there can be. My country was also like this in the past.”

“My country doesn’t have the strength yours does, Kuze-dono. With our main avenue of trade, Seiroad, like this, all we have left is our breeding of Argentavis and what little good agriculture we have.”

Karuda said in a mood of self-derision.

“It was about 70 years ago now, but my country which had only agriculture going for it arose from a condition of burned fields in only a little time.”

“Eh?”

Karuda thought, shocked. She couldn’t imagine a country with as much power as Kuze’s group ever falling to such a state.

“You just need to fix what is broken. Don’t you just have to live enough for those who have died? Ah, this is from the note of my now-deceased great-grandfather who fought in the Pacific War, though.”

Karuda squinted her eyes.

“Live enough...”

“Eh, those who have died won’t return. For those who won’t return, what we can do for them surely isn’t limited to crying.”

“That... May be true...”

Karuda put her face to Kuze’s shoulder. It’s warm, she thought. I want to fawn on this warmth, she thought. If she lost this now, she probably would never get it again.

“Kuze-dono,”

“Yes?”

“I’m worn out, so for just a little while... Would you let me rest here?”

“I don’t mind. Ah...”

She gently nestled up to him. Like a lover, no, like a wife. She didn’t get it, her lifelong happiness. Even if just a little, she wanted that little bit of the life she wanted, and she put her hand on top of Kuze’s camo glove. [1]

She acted like she didn’t see anyone else. However, no one from her country was there, so she continued in this manner.

Kuze wondered if there was some word of ridicule due to the situation by others, but as he was the commander, it didn’t seem anyone would do that. Kuze focused a bit on her long hair and smelled its sweet scent as he got a little carried away in it, and he felt a huge relief.

That is, in this mad world of war, he protected a life that is unmistakably irreplaceable. Resting her face on the nape of his neck, the hair hid her quiet tears.

“Thank you... I will try to live again, I think...”

Kuze wrapped his arms around her shoulders. Along with the sound of the engine and the burning town below, he could faintly hear her crying voice. It was terrible background noise. But, in its own twisted way, it was beautiful, this hymn to the living.

The future will not end. People will live. Even in this parallel world, that won’t change.

Epilogue: The Breeze of Peacekeeping

Part 1

“Thank you for the invitation, Your Highness Hamieea.”

Wearing the pure white uniform of the marine self-defense force, Kaburagi gave a salute in front of the throne. Over a hundred court ladies and civil officials bowed and the court guard gave the military general of those who had come from a parallel world a loud salute of honor.

The beautiful ringing of bells reverberated throughout the castle. Kaburagi was a little perplexed by how young the queen before his eyes was. Hamieea grinned at him.

“Wha~at, it is I who doth apologize. To have but such a bland revelry.”

Katou, who stood next to Kaburagi, smiled wryly. If this is considered simple, what kind of scene would a grand ceremony be? The 10 staff members of the marine and land SDF who were in attendance were astonished at the queen’s words.

“It is after a war; it couldn’t be helped.”

Katou said, and Hamieea began to frown a bit. The destruction of the Imperial Capital Defense Force and the after effect of the small meteorites falling. This nation probably still has many hardships that would continue in the future.

“Yes indeed... But if the survivors doth remain morose after night, none remain to appreciate the rising sun. Faint as it may be, today doth have a cheerful ring to it, so let us celebrate for we be allowed to live to this moment.”

“Indeed.”

Kaburagi and his fellow SDF officers were invited as guests of honor to a ‘celebration of victory’. It was because they used defensive measures as a national military that they boldly entered the fight, so in their hearts they wanted to change at the word “victory”.

But, it was thanks to the continued morale and unity of this nation's people that this was possible, so it was a choice of words that couldn't be helped, so they accepted it. To celebrate, the leaders of the "volunteer army", the SDF commanders, were to be given the greatest tokens of gratitude.

There were plans to bestow awards upon them. But, the more important matter of concern to the SDF members was if they could return to their original world or not. As the celebration party began, Kaburagi asked Hamieea this question.

"Hm... Regarding that matter..." (Hamieea)

She showed a somewhat troubled expression in response to Kaburagi's question. It was like she was choosing her words.

"It isn't as though there exists no path of return. However, returning thou and thy subordinates, Kaburagi-dono, back to your original world ought prove to be a tough challenge for my nation alone."

"What exactly does that mean?"

Katou added to the conversation while holding a glass in one hand.

"Yes, I investigated the matter, and the magic which hath summoned thee to this world ought be the same as the "Falling Star"; it be something passed on since times ancient from the civilization of the people of the wings." (Hamieea)

"That girl with wings that suddenly showed up..."

Katou thought back to the girl that suddenly appeared in the wardroom.

"Thus, it necessitates thou to go to the land which many claim as the Heritage of the People of the Wings."

"Then, let's hurriedly join forces with this country! Is it far away?"

"... It be far, certainly."

Kaburagi smiled.

"It's fine, we have a machine to fly and all."

Katou said optimistically to her.

"Yes. If it's too far in-land to get to with our helicopters, we can use our

vehicles. Where is it? That country?”

“Far away, on the other side of the ocean...”

She stared at the deep ocean across from the terrace. And, she informed them of the cruel fact of the matter.

“—‘The Land of the Ancient People of the Wings’ ought now be known as ‘the Imperial Capital of the Filborg Inheritance Empire’.”

The SDF commanders were at a loss for words. *What did she say just now?*

The leaders looked at each other. Presently, coming to understand the meaning of her words, they were dumbfounded. That was the country they sent missiles at and showered with bullets. Common sense in will tell you that you couldn’t hope to compromise with such a country.

“We offer our sincerest apologies, Kaburagi-dono. There hath been no other choice...”

Hamieea cast her eyes down. She had understood everything. She had not lied. She just didn’t tell them about this fact.

Though it may as well have been a lie, had she been completely open about it, it could have spelled ruin for them

, thought Kaburagi.

They were already caught in the confusion of this world, unable to escape. It seems the SDF organization when brought to a parallel world had been used by authority. A heavy atmosphere ruled the place. However, suddenly, Katou made a bright expression and broke the silence.

“Let’s decide what to do later! It is still too early to say there is nothing we can do.”

Kaburagi, with a ‘taken aback’ expression, looked at Katou. He sweetly grinned at Katou who’s often aloof and reluctant to accept reality, as usual.

“For now, let’s celebrate!”

As he said that, he held up his glass. Kaburagi felt that he could understand the incident mentioned earlier with the girl who appeared in the wardroom.

“I have no choice but to trust you...”

She held some sort of expectation for them. It had to be them. She couldn't just have trust her own world to a corps so pathetically soaked in peace. The meaning wasn't just to overcome a battle. She wasn't asking the SDF, which was forbidden from fighting, to fight.

What were they in charge of?

They didn't understand. They understood just one thing. That little girl was sacrificed for what they were asked to do. Katou, who understood these feelings of that little girl along with Kaburagi, held his glass and spoke to those around him. For a repose of her soul, he said these words.

“To peace!”

Part 2

As the ceremony was beginning in the castle——

“Huh?”

It seemed to Kuze that constantly stirring a cauldron with a giant spatula was some form of torture. And, he had a feeling that someone called out to him.

He, who had a triangle bandana wrapped around his head, looked around himself in his apron. He turned around, and there was a single woman standing there.

“ ‘It's been a while', isn't something I can say yet, eh, Kuze-dono? But, what exactly is this?”

The woman—Karuda—shyly observed the unfamiliar machine.

“Ah, sorry. This? Our job right now is making rations for the others.”

Kuze took off his triangle bandana and left the provisional tent to a subordinate as he stepped outside. Kuze's platoon is using a type of field range in the SDF's huge field kitchen to cook for those in need.

This way, they can distribute the food they make to those victims who have lost their houses and such. Their current job changed from being the heroes

who saved the nation to a disaster dispatch team giving out food.

With the war over and nothing to do, the SDF members were motivated to do something rather than nothing, so a very real development to help the nation on land occurred.

The SDF's special mission is emergency deployment over real battle. In their original world, such devotion was dedicated to overseas deployments, but the country has slowly started to accept it as well.

But, the idea of them as foreigners, who can use magic and have an unknown goal is still a deeply-rooted thought, and there is not even a single sign of life around. The Ground Self-Defense Force have expanded to the park in the middle of the city.

Right around the corner, you can see the bell tower for the church Ryumi works at. Some time ago, this was a lush place for the citizens to rest at. However, due to the Imperial soldier's roughness, not a sign of that was left.

But, that there was little damage done to people from the meteorite was something to be happy about amidst the misfortune. Most of the meteorites fell into the ocean. A large number of the civilians had started taking steps towards reconstruction.

The members of the force were genuinely moved by their unending strength. Compared to the crisis of destruction the civilians had faced, this situation may not be so bitter. There was probably a sense of insecurity, but there isn't too much disorder as there are leaders invested with respect to guide them.

"We enlisted the help of Ryumi-san, since after the war there was a lack of food, we are making food for everyone who we can reach out to."

Karuda bent down on the bench in the park next to Kuze, who was already sitting, and looked at his profile and faintly smiled.

"As always, you're a knight who likes simple work."

"I haven't been trained to do flashy things."

He wiped his sweat from the hot sun illuminating the country, and replenished himself with a gulp of water from the bottle on his hip. There, he at

last realized something.

“Ah, Karuda-san, those clothes...”

Today, she was not wearing her black military uniform. She was wearing a white, sleeveless dress that, at a glance, looked like a china dress. One could see her long legs peek out of the slits of the dress. If she weren't wearing the light breastplate, she'd look like a lady going to an evening party.

“Yeah, I thought it's no longer something that needs to be mourned...”

She said and raised her view to the sky. A small bird chirped while flying over her. Kuze also merely answered with a 'that's nice'. There was silence. But, he thought. He didn't want to say anything awkward or imprudent to her, and he figured that if he simply stated his opinion, she could forgive him.

“Though I don't have anyone I loved who died...”

“Ah.”

“... If I were to die, I'd want those I love to be happy.”

As he returned his water bottle to his waist, he added with a bitter smile.

“Well, I think maybe once in awhile I'd want to be remembered, though.”

“It would be something unforgettable...”

“Probably.”

“But, I think those who just make excuses and never move past it are cowards.”

Kuze gazed at her face. Was it common in this world to take years to move on? At least, if it's for beautiful girls like her, that surely wouldn't help, was the feeling he had.



Just as is, she was naturally pretty enough.

“... So, wh-what do you think?”

“Eh?”

Karuda, as though it were difficult to ask, averted her eyes away from Kuze when she asked.

“Do-does it look... Good? It looks like an import, though.”

Kuze, without thinking, was flabbergasted. He didn't expect Karuda to say such a thing.

“Eh, eeh. It looks amazing, I think.”

It was a lazy statement. It was an ultimately bland thing to say.

“R-really? You mean it?”

“Y-yes. I mean it.”

But, with that, she seemed happy. At the same time, she looked down, out of a sense of embarrassment. Kuze, who had worried about what would be good to say to Karuda, suddenly felt a presence from behind him. Looking, he saw his subordinates grinning, looking at them. Someone in the group was even holding binoculars.

“Ooi! Go back to your posts! Ichinosee! You guys, don't bring out the binoculars!”

Kuze's subordinates ran off like scattered children of a spider. Karuda cleared her throat with a cough. From her breast pocket, she got a sheet of parchment.

“Th-that was a pointless discussion, let's get to the main topic.”

“What is this?”

He stared at the parchment she presented. Kuze couldn't read the characters on the parchment.

Being summoned to this world, it would appear they could only converse in the language.

“This is a notification of your medal to be given to you personally by Her

Majesty the Queen. It is something of prestige, Kuze-dono.”

Karuda squinted her eyes.

“For this purpose, I have come to pick you up to bring you there immediately.”

“W-wait a bit, at least let me take off my apron...”

In hot haste, he began to make his outfit befit the occasion. Karuda grabbed that man’s hand tightly.

“Wa-it!”

“There will be no waiting! This is a medal given to you guys and no one else!”

“Auauagh...”

The victims around them saw a rare sight: a commissioned officer of the Flying Light Armor Unit walking with a man wearing strange green clothes. She lead him to the resting area of the giant birds, and there was one girl already standing there. She wore the navy blue and pure white clothes of a Shinto priest. She recognized Kuze’s form and her expression quickly brightened up.

“I’ve waited for you, Kuze-sama!”

“Even Ryumi-chan!?”

“Yes, thanks to you. I’ve today heard that you are to receive a medal of honor from Her Majesty, so together with Karuda-sama, we have come to get you.”

Ryumi respectfully asked him to ride on the saddle of a giant bird, saying “Now, now, this way.”

“Ah, eh, w-wait a second!”

Was it alright to ride like this, without a safety belt secured or stuff like that? Kuze confusedly searched for something to grab onto. He did such, and Karuda lightly moved to be on the neck of the giant bird to fly it.

“OK, let’s go.”

She donned her goggles on her forehead, and as the rider of the giant bird, grabbed the reins and yelled. Forcefully, the bird got up, and started running on the ground.

“Nouuuuuuuaaaagh!?”

Kuze, who had never rode a bird like this or done anything comparable, raised a yell on the bird fiercely moving to fly off the ground. His pitiable voice went out to the blue skies of the southern side of the country. The cool breeze of peace wrapped around them.